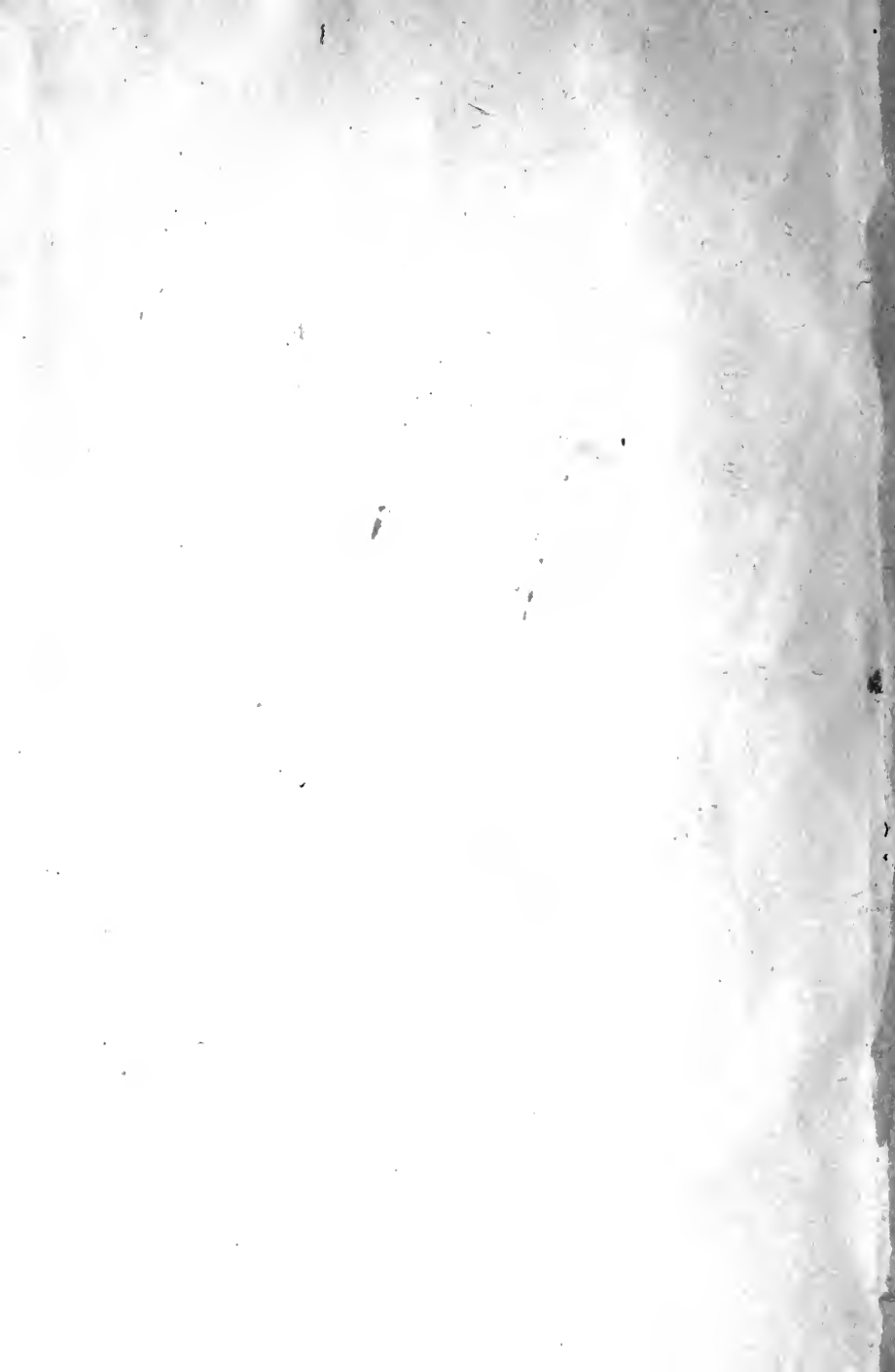






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LETTERS

AGABOND HERON

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ARCHIE LOVELL BY MRS. EDWARDES.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

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ARCHIE LOVELL.

A NOVEL.

BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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ARCHIE LOVELL.

CHAPTER I.

A Vampire Brood.

IT was a bright moonlight night, in the last week of July, 186—, and half the population of Morteville-sur-Mer had turned out, as the fashion of Morteville-sur-Mer is, to walk upon the pier.

Among the crowds of men and women thus occupied, and even at a time of year when Morteville is most thronged with sea-bathers from all parts of France, the preponderance of English people was unmistakable. Can you mistake for a moment the dress, the walk, the laugh, the voice of our compatriots?—especially of that class of our compatriots who find it convenient to reside out of England and in such places as Morteville-sur-Mer? A few Britons of a different type there may have been there,—quiet, plainly-dressed people,—passing through Morteville on their way to Paris, and walking on the pier after dinner simply because better air was to be got there than in the stifling over-crowded hotels within the town. But these you would have passed without notice in the crowd. The mass of Britons, the mass who arrested your eye and your ear as they passed, were the English residents in the place—the actual Anglo population of Morteville-sur-Mer: some of them flashy and over-dressed; others

poor-looking, subdued, out-at-elbows; but none wholly devoid of interest to the careful observer of his kind. For every one who lives in Morteville has a reason for doing so. And in the history of every one who has a reason for living out of his country, there must, I think, be something—some misfortune, some debt, some imbecility, oftentimes some crime—that may well make us, who sit by our own firesides still, pause and meditate.

“I don’t believe their name is Wilson, at all,” remarked Mrs. Dionysius O’Rourke; “and if you recollect right, my dear Mrs. Maloney, I said so to you from the first. I believe he’s a Trant—one of Lord Mortemaine’s sons—away in hiding from his creditors; indeed O’Rourke says he can swear to having seen the man’s face in Homburg three years ago, and then his name was Smithett. He, he, he!” and Mrs. O’Rourke, being the possessor of six hundred a-year, and so a magnate in Morteville, her laugh was instantly echoed among the little knot of familiar and congenial spirits by whom she was at this moment surrounded.

“I’ve nothing to say against the poor unfortunate man himself,” chimed in the shrill voice of old Mrs. Maloney, the Mrs. Candour of the community. “Indeed, I think every one must pity him, poor creature, with the life he leads at home between those dreadful women. But as to his daughter!—as to Miss Archie Wilson!”

And Candour threw up her eyes, and clasped her aged hands, as one might do who possessed all the details—but would not—no, no, no! for worlds would not reveal them—of an erring fellow-creature’s sins.

“Miss Wilson is really growing very pretty,” said

another voice, a man's this time. "Who would have thought a year ago she would turn out such a fine-looking girl?"

"Oh, I think her lovely, lovely!" exclaimed an enthusiastic impulsive young being of about four-and-thirty. "Such beautiful eyes, and such a sweet mouth and teeth, Captain Waters! Poor, *poor* little Archie!"

The speaker was Miss Augusta Marks,—Gussy Marks, as she was commonly called among her friends; at once the professional toad-eater general, and the literary or intellectual element of Morteville. On what ground this young creature founded her relationship with the literature of her country was never clearly made out. She referred vaguely herself, it was understood, to the *Saturday Review*; but her more intimate friends professed themselves to be in possession of data regarding a romance once contributed by her to the *Brompton Herald*, or *Penny Household Guide*, under the title of "Lucile, or the Duke's Victim: a Revelation from Life." Whether this was true or false; whether the revelation was printed or allowed to remain in manuscript, Gussy Marks announced herself, and all Morteville spoke of her, as a literary character. If she had written *Vanity Fair*, could she have done more? If you can attain a reputation without work, who is the gainer? Only in one respect the somewhat impalpable nature of her profession made itself disagreeably felt. Gussy remained poor; and had to work hard for her daily dinner by fetching and carrying news about from house to house, and generally flattering all such persons—there were not very many in Morteville—as would not only receive poor Gussy's attentions, but let

her take their value out afterwards in solid eating and drinking.

Amusing Miss Gussy Marks undoubtedly was. She was bitterly spiteful; and to strangers, when they first settle in a dull place like Morteville, bitter, inveterate spite, even when it is unseasoned by a grain of wit, is better than no entertainment at all. But she was not capable, as in their different fashions were Mesdames O'Rourke and Maloney, of boldly killing any man's reputation outright. Some of Mrs. O'Rourke's falsehoods were sudden, almost justifiable homicides. Gussy's carefully-worded equivocations were deliberate, cold-blooded murders; murders with malice aforethought. She belonged to the class who whisper about versions, more or less blackened, of other people's vilifications; who supply all missing links in other people's evidence; who are "sure they heard so somewhere—not from you, dearest Mrs. Blank? Then from some one else, for I know *I* never thought so." The vilest, the most cowardly class of all, in short. The assassin runs some risk; the wretch who hovers round till the deed is done, and then warily begins to mangle the helpless corpse of the slain, none.

"Such an agreeable companion! such unfailing spirits!" all new-comers to Morteville pronounced as Miss Marks prostrated herself in turn at their feet. Then, as the months passed, the new-comer's door would gradually open less freely to Gussy; and the women of the family would speak of her as "a very amusing person for a time; but—" and the men make short cuts down the nearest street whenever they met her; and poor Gussy have to fall back for intimacy on her old patronesses—the O'Rourke-and-Maloney coali-

tion—and any such stray birds as she might chance occasionally to pick up at their houses.

On this especial evening, and at this moment, when Archie Wilson's ill-doings are being brought forward for the purpose of moral animadversion, a whole group of the notabilities or typical people of Morteville are assembled beneath the lighthouse at the extreme end of the pier: *inter alia*, Mrs. Dionysius O'Rourke, Mr. Montacute and his daughters, the literary element, Captain Waters, and old Mrs. Maloney—a majority of ladies, as is generally the case, the Englishmen in Morteville not affecting much appearance in public. They play cards of a morning, play them of an afternoon, play them of an evening (very well they play too: don't sit down here at loo or écarté unless you are tolerably sure of your game); and the two or three men, who happen at the present moment to be absent from the club, puff away helplessly at their cigars, and listen, without offering any observations of their own, while the women talk.

Let me take a rapid sketch of one or two of these people before Miss Archie Wilson's character is submitted to the scalpel. *A Dieu ne plaise* that they should hold any place save in this first or introductory scene of my story! *à Dieu ne plaise* that I should essay to paint a finished picture of one of them! But a few brief outlines my pen must with repugnance trace: first, to make you understand what manner of people these are who speak; secondly, to show you in what kind of social atmosphere Archie Wilson herself—the unconscious subject of their moral vivisection—had spent the last two years of her child's life.

Mrs. Dionysius O'Rourke—on account of her great

size as well as her high position in society, I feel that I must give her precedence over her friends—was a lady of about, say, fifty-five, and of considerable social experience; had been twice married—(“Let us say married! Ah, yes—married!” Mrs. Maloney would remark with bitter irony during the half-yearly period when these two potentates invariably passed each other without bowing in the street)—and had resided in every place of easy resort on the Continent. In all that Mrs. O’Rourke ever told respecting the past, the first husband was dropped altogether; the second, Colonel Morier, or as she, in her vain attempts to lisp down the native Tipperary, called it, “Mawyer,” brought into extraordinary preëminence, save on one occasion, well remembered by the Maloney, when a family called Morier really came to Morteville, and when Mrs. O’Rourke never mentioned their name nor came outside her door during the six weeks of their stay. The third and present one, Mr. Dionysius O’Rourke, seemed to be viewed both by his wife and by her friends in the light of a butler—an hypothesis that O’Rourke himself supported by the assumption of all those broad and generous views in regard to the consumption of liquor which butlers generally hold.

To judge by the number of dukes and duchesses she talked of, Mrs. O’Rourke had mixed in excellent society all her life; and barring the adventitious circumstances of seventeen stone of solid flesh, the ineradicable Tipperary, and an undue tendency to gorgeous yellow satin and birds of strange plumage in the matter of dress, she was really an entertaining, and, on the theory of Joe Gargery, a fine figure of a woman. She took away everybody’s character, certainly; but

who should know better than Mrs. O'Rourke how easy it is for people to live and be happy without *that*? And she gave and enjoyed good dinners, and not worse wine than was commonly current in Morteville. How could any one say that Mrs. Maloney's infamous stories of bygone days were correct? Would not an open house, a real butler (as well as O'Rourke), and six-hundred a-year, insure popularity in other places as well as Morteville-sur-Mer?

Mrs. Maloney, Mrs. O'Rourke's closest ally and most implacable enemy, was of a totally different build; for whereas Mrs. O'Rourke had been wicked and prosperous, and gone into a comfortable mass of human flesh and blood, Mrs. Maloney had been wicked and grown lean upon it; and in that one fact of being in a Banting or anti-Banting state lies much philosophy. Indeed it is not certain that, for moral classification, the whole of humanity might not broadly be divided into these two sections,—the fat, the lean; the jovial, the ascetic. There were softening moments, weaknesses of the flesh, in Mrs. O'Rourke, as in all fat, food-loving creatures. At a certain tempered stage of fulness, one point short of surfeit or inebriety—in the interval, for instance, between dinner and the last glass of hot brandy-and-water before bed-time—she would as soon have called you a good fellow as a bad one; but no eating or drinking ever mollified Mrs. Maloney's flinty soul or softened a line upon her bird-like hatchet-face. She could never overcome her sickening spite against the human race for persisting still in being young and handsome and happy, as she had once been. She detested people for being wicked, because she had no longer the temptation to be wicked herself; she detested

them for being good, because she had never known the meaning of good while she lived.

When Mrs. Dionysius O'Rourke went to the Morte-ville balls, all the little Frenchmen would run about after her, in sheer amazement at her undraped bulk.

"Hold, Alphonse! hast thou seen the English mamma! But 'tis rather an exhibition for a museum than a ball-room. *Une hippopotame qui se décolletè comme ça!*"

From old Mrs. Maloney's corpse-like face and anatomical neck and arms, bared as only utter fleshlessness can ever bare itself, men of all nations turned away with horror. She was not even curious. Occasionally indeed, she would drag into her meshes some unfledged boy who thought it savoured of manliness to ape precocious cynicism, or some hoary-headed roué who would fain hear the vices imputed to others which he no longer had it in his power to commit. And then was Mrs. Maloney in her glory. Then she almost felt that in the possession of a tongue like hers resides compensation for being old and loveless and unbeautiful. Then was youth vilified and age dishonoured; then were beauty and love and faith, and all the fairness and the nobleness of our common humanity, disfigured by the vitriol flung from that black heart, until her listener—however foolish, however world-hardened—would turn away with a shudder from the blasphemies of those lips that had once been fresh and young, and that children's kisses had blest.

Look at the pictured impersonations in which the old painters' fancies used to embody all that men conceive of when they use the word *fiend*—the malignant, the impious, the hopeless—and you will see Maloney;

she who thirty years before, had been, if fame spoke true, the beauty and the toast of one of the most brilliant, the most genial-hearted cities in the kingdom.

If priest or parson would have let her mount into his pulpit, show her withered face, and vent her impotent rage against the life she had made vile use of, *there* had been a sermon to keep women pure and men honourable. The Spartans turned their drunken slaves to some account. Can we, with all our science, find no use for the scum, the dregs of our society? Is our children's love of honour, of virtue, of truth, of courage—of the crown of all these, charity—to be taught by written books alone?

Seated between these two women—I pass over Mr. O'Rourke, a poor little man weighing about as much as any one of his wife's limbs, and at this particular moment, as usual, not by any means more pleasant company for all the brandy he had taken since his dinner—seated between Mesdames O'Rourke and Maloney was Captain Waters, one of the head dandies or clothes-wearing men of Morteville.

Captain Waters was perhaps eight-and-twenty, perhaps eight-and-forty. Certain effete and obliterated human faces seem of texture too putty-like for time's finger to mark them with any lasting indentation. Captain Waters had one of these faces. He had pale hair, pale eyes, pale cheeks, pale girlish hands, a pale coat, a pale hat, and an eye-glass; the last the most distinctive feature about him. Who was Captain Waters? No one knew. What service had he been in? What were his means of living? No one knew. It was faintly believed that he was a married man; one of those stray

atoms of matrimony that do float about on the surface of Anglo-Continental life. It was believed also that some one thought they had once seen him in Italy robbing a church with the Garibaldians. It was generally admitted that he played the best game of *écarté* in Morteville. As far as voice and manner went, Captain Waters was a gentleman; only an occasional restlessness of manner, a proneness to change any conversation as soon as it trenched too nearly on his own personal history, betraying the class of professional adventurers to which he belonged. He said he was related—very possibly it was true—to more than one great English family, and that nothing but a change in the Cabinet was needed for him to obtain one of the foreign diplomatic appointments for which his perfect command of Continental languages fitted him. In the mean time, he was economising abroad, that is to say, wearing good clothes, living at one of the best hotels in the place; flirting desperately with young ladies; getting dinners out of old ones; and generally winning the money of any men who were well-born enough to become Captain Waters's companions—he detested vulgar people—and to walk arm-in-arm with him on the Morteville Pier.

Captain Waters was spiteful; as spiteful to the full as Mesdames O'Rourke and Maloney. But while theirs was heartfelt, malignant spite—the work of artists who put their hearts into what they fabricated—Captain Waters's was dilettanteism. Every thing, even the trouble of pulling characters to pieces, bored or seemed to bore him. Nothing, including every possible moral depravity or deformity, surprised him. Raising his eye-glass up a quarter of an inch, taking his cigarette

languidly in his little blue-veined hand, and smiling barely enough to show his even teeth, he would just throw in a word, a delicate finishing touch, when the other common assassins had done their work. You may imagine what the word would be to appreciative hearers. A plat, dressed by the hand of a *cordon bleu*, crowning some repast of high-seasoned coarser dishes—savoury and tasteful perhaps in their way, but lacking that quintessence of flavour which only education and refinement knows how to prepare for the palate of civilised man.

The last noticeable person in the group was Miss Gussy Marks, a few of whose moral characteristics we have already considered. The *personnel* of this young person, had she flourished thirty years ago, might have justified her claims in the matter of literature; for thirty years ago, women who wrote were, we learn, considered in this country somewhat in the light of monsters—women only in their invincible inferiority of brain; but otherwise unsexed by the mere attempt to raise themselves above their samplers. Miss Marks had a high bare forehead, a flat head, beetling eyebrows, great bird-like eyes and nose, a splendid development of animalism about the lower part of the face, and a moustache! Yes, a moustache! Why should I euphemise? A moustache such as many a fledgling ensign would incur his year's debts in advance to possess.

The last new-comers to Morteville—consequently the last new chance of dinner that Miss Marks was seeking to propitiate—were Mr. and the two Miss Montacutes, by whose side she now stood. Regarding them there is little to say. The Miss Montacutes were pretty girls, who talked a good deal of grand married

sisters, and their regret at having to come to such a slow place as Morteveille for poor mamma's health. And Mr. Montacute was a man who had formerly been rich and now was poor, and who had spent a great deal of his time in various Continental jails, and already was meditating as to how much was likely to be garnered out of the Morteveille shopkeepers before he should run away. Yet once Mr. Montacute had kept open house and given money with a free hand to those who asked him for it, and had brought up his lads to call dishonour by its right name. Look at his face now,—the set hard mouth, the eyes that won't meet yours; listen to the bullying tone in which he talks to his wife and daughters, and say if professional insolvency can be pleasant work to a man who was bred a gentleman? Say if he too might not add some comments to that unwritten sermon of which I spoke just now?

"Poor little Archie Wilson!" repeated Miss Marks, with unction; "if some one would only take the child up, something might be made of her yet."

"I should think somebody would be quite sure to take her up," suggested Captain Waters, in the intervals of making a fresh cigarette. "You need not be uneasy on that score, Miss Marks."

"Captain Waters, you are too bad," cried Mrs. Maloney, while Mrs. O'Rourke chuckled, and the Miss Montacutes remarked demurely how plainly you could see the lighthouse on the opposite coast. "Of course it's all very amusing for you gentlemen, but for the ladies in the place—and young ladies especially—I say it's most embarrassing. Why, really now, Miss Montacute, you mustn't be shocked, but I do think it

right to put you on your guard"—only Mrs. Maloney called it 'gu'iard.' "What do you suppose I saw last night from my window?"

No one's imagination was equal to the emergency. Captain Waters looked up at the sky and smiled.

"Well, then, you must know, Mr. Montacute, my lodgings is just opposite to the Wilsons', Roo d'Artois—and 'twas a moonlight night, as this may be, and everything as distinct as possible—and about eleven, or half-past, I sat down by my window to think a little"—she sighed piously,—“before retiring to rest, when what should come out from the Wilsons' parlour-window but a man's figure!"

The whole company repeated, as one man, the word "window!"

"Yes, window!" exulted Mrs. Maloney, warming to her work. "If it had been by the door no one would have been more willing than myself to give her the benefit of the doubt, for of course the Dormers live on the first, and the old Countess d'Eu on the second; and it is possible, though extremely unlikely, that this person might have been unconnected with the Wilsons. But no, it was from their window it appeared. They live on the rez-de-chaussée, Mr. Montacute. Not that I blame them for that, poor creatures; but with Mrs. Wilson wearing a silk-velvet cloak, and Archie, to my own knowledge, seven pairs of boots since Christmas, economy it is not. A man's figure, dressed in a short paletot, a wide-awake hat, and smoking a cigar! Now comes the point of the story. That figure was Miss Archie Wilson herself!"

Horror on all sides; even Captain Waters languidly interested.

"And dressed—like a man?" ejaculated Gussy Marks plaintively; "dressed *quite* like a man, my dear Mrs. Maloney?"

"Well, no," explained Maloney, "the miserable girl wore some kind of dark skirt, which indeed betrayed her to me—that and her hair, which, although it was tucked up, I could see the bright red in the moonlight; but for the rest of her figure dressed as I tell you—a man's paletot, a wideawake hat, and smoking a cigar. She paraded up and down the pavement for some time, her hands in her pockets, her hat stuck on one side, and no more ashamed of herself, my dear, than any of us are now! Indeed, the way she stared up at me was so offensive that I rose at last and shut down my window, and saw no more of the disgusting spectacle. We may form our own conclusions," sniffed Mrs. Maloney, virtuously,—*"we may form our own conclusions as to what should make a young girl assume such a disguise, and steal away from her father's house at midnight. Whatever Christian charity has bid me do hitherto, I feel my duty to society leaves me only one course now—I shall treat Miss Archie Wilson with the hotombar at once; and I think every other well-conducted woman"*—Captain Waters's cigarette made him cough—"should do the same."

Though Mrs. Maloney had lived much abroad, her mastery of French idiom was still precarious; hence one of her favourite expressions was that of treating people with the *hotombar*, which fanciful compound she emphasised much as she might have done the word tomahawk, or any other deadly weapon of attack.

"But perhaps it was all done as a joke," hazarded the prettiest Miss Montacute, who was too young and

innocent to be shocked. "When Tom's at home, Lizzie and I often dress up in his hat and coat—don't we, Lizzie?"

"Yes, but you don't go out into the streets in male dress, dear Miss Montacute," put in old Gussy Marks persuasively. "Of that I am quite sure. This poor neglected child, Archie, possibly—possibly does these things in ignorance; but still"—Gussy mused or pretended to muse—"it is confirmatory of what I told you I had seen, Mrs. O'Rourke, is it not?"

"And what have you seen, Miss Marks?" inquired Captain Waters, when Mrs. O'Rourke had croaked forth her little contribution of venom. "Don't let us lose one scrap of evidence against this unhappy and misguided young person."

"My scrap of evidence, then," answered Gussy, growing suddenly tart,— "my scrap of evidence, Captain Waters, is, that Archie goes out on these moonlight expeditions to meet Mr. Durant,—nothing more."

"To meet Mr. Durant?" repeated Waters, really opening his eyes now, and flinging the end of his cigarette into the sea—"the man who is staying at my hotel?"

There was something to be interested in at last. Not a wretched little girl's reputation, but the possibility of detaining in Morteville a young man so excessively fond of staking high, and so excessively ignorant of all the finer intricacies of *écarté* as Mr. Durant. They had played together now for five nights; and after deducting the necessary loss incurred by Waters on the first night of the match, Mr. Durant was about one hundred and twenty pounds to the bad. What a *deus*

ex machinâ it would be if any little flirtation should turn up and make the young man linger about this place! As the vision of Archie's fair girlish face rose before him, Captain Waters felt himself quite soften. Poor pretty little thing! If these old women's stupid scandals were to get about and reach the father's ears, the whole thing might be stopped at once.

"I happen to know that Durant has been quietly at home every midnight since he has been in the place, Miss Marks. I don't know whether Miss Archie Wilson went out to meet him or not."

Now, Gussy Marks hated Captain Waters from her soul: first, because, following a fixed rule he had in regard of ugly (penniless) women, he never looked in her face when he spoke to her; secondly, because his superior powers of pleasing had been the means of ousting her from more than one Morteville house, where before his advent she had been wont to drop in, as of right, at dinner-time.

"You may have any opinions you like, Captain Waters, but you will not prevent me, and others with me, from having ours. If Archie Wilson talks to Mr. Durant for an hour together over the back-garden wall of a morning, as I have seen with my own eyes, it is not very scandalous, I think, to assume that she attires herself as Mrs. Maloney saw her do, to meet Mr. Durant at night."

"Over the back-garden wall? Miss Wilson talks to this Mr. What-d'ye-call-him over the back-garden wall? Well, really now we may call it a Providence that the whole thing has come to light; and just before this public ball, where we shall all meet her too! In these foreign places I say one can't be too careful as to the

women one associates with." And Mrs. Maloney cast up her eyes to heaven, as though rendering a mental thanksgiving for the providential escape she had had in the way of moral contamination. "I don't say that I'd go so far as to cut Mr. Wilson, as he calls himself; but as to the girl Archie, I do say that it's a duty we owe to society and to each other to—"

"Good-night, Mrs. Maloney," cried a girl's voice close beside her ear. "I hope, now, you're none the worse for sitting up so late last night. It was lovely in the moonlight, wasn't it?"

A child's face,—bright, saucy, unfearing,—looked back at Mrs. Maloney for a moment; then the girl broke into a laugh,—a clear merry laugh,—that startled more than one group of foreigners out of their conventional decorum, and Miss Archie Wilson disappeared in the crowd.

For one minute the people who had been talking of her did show sufficient humanity to be guiltily silent. Then, "She has gone down to the sands,—she has gone alone to the sands!" cried old Gussy Marks, who was the first to rally. "And a gentleman with her,—yes, a gentleman with her!"

All the group of friends turned their heads eagerly in the direction Gussy pointed out, and by the aid of the brilliant moonlight detected a slight childish figure running down one of the flights of steps that connects the Morteville pier with the sands. A minute later, another—and a man's figure was at her side; and all the heads were bent eagerly forward in anticipation of the dreadful and notorious scene they were about to witness. But Morteville to-night was destined to be disappointed of a scandal; and a sort of groan passed

through the group of friends as they discovered their mistake. The man proved to be no other than Archie Wilson's father.

"A blind!" cried Mrs. Maloney, with the resolute tone of a Christian determined not to be done out of her righteous indignation. "Archie Wilson put on her new hat to walk on the sands with her father! Wait till midnight, and look through my window, if you want to judge of Miss Wilson's innocence! To remind me to my very face of what I'd seen! Dark as it is, she must have seen that I treated her with the *hotombar* that she deserved. Little wretch!"

And then the company breaking up into couples, as they resumed their walk, the characters of each other, as well as of Miss Archie Wilson, began to be demolished.

Let us leave them here, and for ever, to their work!

CHAPTER II.

The Honourable Frederick Lovell.

WILL no one write for us the lives of Unsuccessful Men? The brothers of the poets, the first cousins of the painters, the godmothers and godfathers of the novelists,—enterprising writers of biography have shown us these and all other relations of great men from their cradles to their graves. And still the human beings nearer to greatness still,—the men who have not succeeded,—find no historian.

“He started with eighteen-pence in his pocket,” we are accustomed to read of the one successful man out of ten thousand. “Eighteen-pence in his pocket, a habit of early rising, strict religious principles, and a taste for arithmetic; and died worth half a million.” All right for him,—the one sheep garnered into the great fold of success; but what account have we of the rest of the shadowy host for whose prudence, whose patience, whose religious principles, whose arithmetic even, no market ever came? If there is any law that governs the secret of human success, we have signally failed as yet in discovering its mode of operation. Patience certainly goes a very short way towards attaining it—the great majority of men and women seem to be intensely patient at failure during all their wasted sixty or seventy years of life; and as to great ability, look at some of the best-paid, and yet the shallowest charlatans in the world’s history!

Some years ago a Frenchman wrote a book, showing that unsuccessful men of ability are destined by every law, moral and physiological, to become the progenitors of successful ones. Given a father whose life has been spent in a series of intellectual failures, and you will most likely see a son in whom these inchoate tendencies shall assume the shape men worship as success. All the arguments of the book I have forgotten, but I must confess the Frenchman's theory, true or false, struck me at the time as a pleasant one. It assigns to us some use,—to us who have invested our little capital to our best, who have striven as manfully as the most successful among them all, and yet have made no mark upon the age. We represent the sterile year when nature is readjusting her forces, the field which next spring shall be green with corn, the orchard which next autumn shall be bowed down with fruit. More consolatory, at least, to view our failure so,—as the result of physical laws out of our reach at present; more consolatory, I say, to believe there is an average of successful men to each fifty years, and that it is accident whether our fathers' failures are stepping-stones for us, or our own stepping-stones for our sons. Looking over our chest of unpublished MSS., or our gallery of unsold pictures, or our scheme for national defence (that the government was mad enough to reject), or our electric-telegraph improvement which broke down only through one error (rectified next week by Smith, who made twenty-five thousand pounds),—shall we not face these our past failures with better temper if we take the Frenchman's view of the subject, than if, as all biographies of successful Britons seem to bid us do, we believe that we have failed because we

deserved to fail? We have had our dreams of greatness,—we have thought of inventions that should benefit mankind, have known bitter wintry mornings and sultry noons, have sacrificed and suffered and come to grief. But that we have missed the palm is no absolute reason why the saints who do wear it should deny that our feet once stood, even as theirs did, beside the stake.

The Honourable Frederick Lovell, at present known in Morteville under the name of Wilson, was an instance of thorough painstaking, patient, and absolute failure. In an age when one hundred and nine thousand copies of the second Solomon's poems have been sold, why, I ask myself, did Frederick Lovell's never meet with success? They were commonplace, verbose, affected, strained, moral, and enormously bulky. And still the second Solomon was taken, and poor Frederick Lovell left.

"To be a poet," says Mr. Carlyle, "a man must have an insight into the eternal veracities." Frederick Lovell for years had never wearied of repeating this axiom and applying it to himself. Do you understand its meaning, reader? Do I understand it? We think we do, perhaps; and Frederick Lovell thought he did. Who shall say what mysterious flaw in his power of judgment made him to err so egregiously? Where are we to draw the border-line that confined him, as it confines hundreds of painstaking men like him, to such intolerable mediocrity? Until Macaulay told the world that Robert Montgomery's writings bore the same relation to poetry which a Turkish carpet bears to a picture, the world looked upon that arch-impostor as one of the master-spirits of the age. But the wildly-inverted

metaphors, the quivering fire-clouds, the racing hurricanes, the galloping white waves, the earth dashing into eternity, of Frederick Lovell scarcely found a critic who would condemn them. And here and there in his writings were thoughts—unstolen ones too—to which all the Montgomerys, all the second Solomons, could never have given utterance. The man was not a poet; yet on rare occasions you felt that he came painfully, pathetically near to one. Fools and wise men are not two separate nations, with a sea rolling between them, but neighbours each of a common border-land; and in this border-land are many whose nationality it is sometimes hard to decide upon. Frederick Lovell possessed many gifts that certainly put him far away from the category of fools. He was laborious to a degree; he loved his art, or what to him stood for art; he honestly strove to study nature and reproduce her, both with his pen and brush—for the poor fellow painted pictures as bulky as his poems. He was as immeasurably remote from being a fool as he was from being an artist—nay further, I would fondly like to think. And still, looking at his pictures and reading his verses, the human heart that loved him most—a child's—knew that they were not, and never would be works of art. All the ingredients were there, like the colours in the Turkey carpet; the glow of genius, that should fuse and mould them into one harmonious whole, was utterly and for ever wanting.

In his social relations Mr. Lovell had failed as much as in his artistic ambition. He started in life as there seemed every probability of his ending it, with an invincible repugnance to accept that belief which most men, wise or fools, have mastered by the age of

nine, namely, that two and two make four. Money, or the saving or the utilising of money, nay the enjoyment of money, seemed a subject altogether beyond Frederick Lovell's grasp. On his twenty-first birthday, he came into twenty thousand pounds; on his twenty-fifth, five thousand out of this sum remained. He had not been very vicious or very extravagant, he thought. He had travelled about, and bought pictures, and enjoyed artistic society, and seen his friends at his table; and it was a very great pity that so little could be done upon a moderate income. What would it be best to do with the five thousand pounds that yet remained? Marry, perhaps.

When any excessively poor man desires to multiply his poverty by two, there is always some excessively poor young woman ready to assist him in working out this little sum of social arithmetic. Just at this juncture Frederick Lovell might, if he had possessed ordinary sense, have settled himself with bread to his mouth for life; his first cousin, the Lady Olivia Carstairs, with fifteen thousand pounds of her own, and only five years older than himself, being willing to become his wife. He told his family he would do everything they all thought right; and promised the following Monday to make Lady Olivia a formal offer of marriage. But on the Sunday that intervened, a girl with long eye-lashes sat two pews before him in church, and Frederick Lovell thought how pleasant it would be to go and live in Rome and study and become an artist in earnest, with such a face as that to haunt his painting-room and inspire his dreams.

He married her; went to Rome and studied; and at the end of a year found himself a widower, in the

possession of a little daughter, three thousand pounds capital, and a great many art studies, that no one but himself thought much of, in his painting-room.

The marriage—what there was of it—had turned out more happily than most marriages in which the first foundations are long eye-lashes. Both of them had offended the whole of their relations by marrying each other; and no letters, save Mr. Lovell's old bills, had ever followed them from England; and they had had no society; and had spent a great deal more money than they could afford. But they had been happy. Happy for twelve months,—fifty-two weeks,—three-hundred and sixty-five days! Had Frederick Lovell done so very badly with his life, I wonder?

“And I would run away with you, just the same again, Fred,” the girl said on her death-bed, with her arms round his neck, and the child, a fortnight old, lying beside her. “Yes, I would, if I knew this was to be the end of it. We should have grown more economical in time, and you would have been a great artist, dear,—I know it. Will you be so without me, I wonder, Fred?”

No; that he never could be. But if he had had in him the materials of a greater man, perhaps he would not have wept for her loss so grievously and so long. Grief, in the true artistic nature, embodies itself, perforce, like every other emotion, in art; and, depend upon it, as soon as Goethe began to seek for consolation in “Egmont,” the composition of that marvellous poem worked off some at least of the edge of his passion for Lili. Frederick Lovell had sufficient concentrativeness to suffer more profoundly than common men,

but not force of will enough to raise himself, as men following a genuine vocation do, above his misery. He wandered about in Italy with the child, spending his money and doing no work, for a great many months; then came back to England, and thought he might as well read for orders and be a priest.

It was the best resolution he ever made in his life; for there were several nice little livings in the Lovell family, and Lady Olivia, unappropriated still, had an immense love for clergymen and parish domination. As a priest he could have worked what stood to him for poetry into very good sermons, and have painted altar-pieces, and stained glass for windows—the poor fellow was very High Church, and quite earnest and sincere in his religious beliefs—and possibly have succeeded in imposing all his labours as works of high art upon an agricultural population. But when do the round men fall into the round grooves of life? Essayists and reviewers hold livings; and men like Frederick Lovell paint pictures and aspire to understand the Eternal Veracities. On the very eve of respectability, his ordination over, and an encouraging letter from Lady Olivia lying on his table, some wandering artist he had known abroad came to visit Mr. Lovell in his London lodgings: and two days later he was a Bohemian on the face of the earth again. His friend had described Dresden and the community of artists there, and the facilities for study and the cheapness of living, in terms too glowing for Frederick Lovell's heart to withstand; and in a fortnight he was installed, with his little daughter, on a third story in the Dresden Market-place, really for once living cheap, and happier than he had yet felt since his wife's death.

He could not write poetry; but I think Mr. Lovell's life at this period was almost an unwritten poem. It was an absurdity for the man to devote himself to an ambition he could never attain, to spend his days in making copies which any student of eighteen in the Government schools could have done better, and his nights in writing tomes of verses that no publisher would ever accept. Still over all one intense, unselfish, never-wearying love shone, and made the life noble. No woman ever tended her first-born child more tenderly than did Mr. Lovell his little motherless daughter. She was two years old now,—a sturdy, forward child; already walking and talking in her fashion, and perfectly cognisant that the great awkward male creature she lived with was, at once, her "Josh" and her humble slave. When she hurt herself in any way, she beat him. Mr. Lovell was an immense angular man, over six feet high. When he refused her anything, she drooped her head immediately, and pretended to be sick; an appeal that never failed to bring him to abject and instant submission to her wishes. It was Miss Lovell's habit to wake between five and six in the morning; and Mr. Lovell, who sat up habitually late at night writing or drawing, was constantly roused from his bed by a pair of tiny, but neither irresolute nor weak, hands at this hour, because "Artie de Mark sehen will," as the child in the broken *patois* worded it. He never rebelled after a certain morning when the child had cried herself white and sick at being refused; and the good German wives, early abroad at their own marketings, would look with wet eyes after the English widower with his black clothes and solemn face, and Archie in his arms, all aflush with delight,

and making her slave stop before every fresh basket of fruit that they passed.

One day, when the child was nearly three years old, her hands and face were fever-parched, and for the first time in her life she refused to eat. The solitary German servant of the household threw up her apron over her face, and said the worthy Lord was going to take the child back to Himself. She had seen two children of her sister's in brain-fever, and, at first, they too had flushed faces, and refused food like the Fräulein, and both of them died.

In an agony of mute horror Mr. Lovell rushed away to the English physician then living in Dresden, and conveyed to him by looks, rather than words, that his child was dying.

"Hangs her head—won't eat—skin hot?" said the doctor. "Mr. Lovell, the child is sickening for the measles. Half the children in Dresden have got measles in its mildest form. Couldn't have it at a better time of the year. No Englishwoman to be with her? Well, let us see now whom you could have,—Miss Curtis? You don't know her?—no matter, Miss Curtis is always ready to nurse any body. I'll get her to go to you before night."

By night Miss Curtis was at Archie's bedside, where she remained for a fortnight. The child was very ill indeed, and wilful, as all strong impetuous children are, under her sufferings; and when Mr. Lovell, helpless in his tortures of fear, watched Miss Curtis bathing his idol's hot eyes, or sponging her hot hands, and soothing her in those thousand ways with which only a woman's hand can soothe a suffering child, he felt that

he could have fallen down and kissed the very hem of her dingy old black-silk gown.

As Archie got better, she clung tenaciously to her new friend. Miss Curtis knew lots of things that Archie did not know. Miss Curtis could deftly create a bird, enclosed within bars and sitting on a perch, out of a sheet of paper. Miss Curtis could paint a boy on one side of a card and a gate on the other, and when you twisted the card round by means of a piece of silk, the boy was sitting astride on the gate—whistling, Miss Curtis averred, and Archie believed; could make life-like sweeps out of one of Mr. Lovell's old waistcoats, with teeth stitched in white silk, and real brushes, cut off the cat's back, in their hands.

"What shall I ever do without-Miss Curtis?" Mr. Lovell thought one day, as he watched her sitting beside Archie darning through a great basket of the child's socks—a branch of domestic economy much neglected by the servant-girl—and keeping her amused with stories at the same time. "There's scarlatina; chicken-pox, whooping-cough, and God knows what besides that the baby may have; how am I to bring her through it all alone? Would she ever have struggled through these dreadful measles without Miss Curtis to nurse her?"

Youth, beauty, money would, I verily believe, not have made Frederick Lovell unfaithful to his buried love. He was not unfaithful to her now. For her child's sake he married Miss Curtis. She was a plain little dowdy woman, a good many years older than himself, a lady by birth and education, with eighty pounds a-year to live on; and when Mr. Lovell asked

her to be his wife, she could really scarcely gasp out "yes," in her bewilderment and gratitude.

"You will find her a treasure—a treasure, my dear sir," remarked her relative the English chaplain, with whom till now she had been living, and who was naturally joyful at transferring her to other hands. "A good wife cometh of the Lord. Would it be requiring too much that my dear cousin's little money should be strictly settled upon herself?"

It was a long time before Mr. Lovell could become accustomed to the special seal of Divine approbation that had been set upon him. He loved beauty in women, and Elizabeth his wife was plain and wizened; he loved silence, and she babbled, chiefly of duchesses, from morning till night; he loved solitude, and he was never alone. Only, as years wore on, and as Archie did take all manner of childish complaints—through all of which her stepmother nursed her faithfully, and as Archie grew to be a great girl, and Mrs. Lovell, to the best that was in her, educated her and made her work at her needle and attended her in her walks abroad, and saw to the lengthening of her frocks, and told her what was right and what was wrong for young girls to do, Mr. Lovell ceased to ask himself if he had done wrong in marrying again. He could not have brought up the girl without a woman of some kind to help him; and companions or governesses would have required a salary, and very likely have struck for marriage just as Archie was beginning to like them. And besides these considerations—love, and all pertaining to love, wholly and for ever gone—Mr. Lovell, in his mania for art, possessed a triple armour against all the

small annoyances of life, even a second wife like his wife Elizabeth.

A mania is a pleasure raised within the sacred regions of the ideal, and so put beyond the reach of common loss or disappointment. Powerless to create himself, the faculty of admiration—the faculty, nay, let me say the rare genius of comprehension, the sole gift which can enable an inferior man to stand at the side of great artists—was Mr. Lovell's.

As years wore on, and as the fact of his own want of success became just a part of his everyday life, he only grew more and more confirmed in his admiration for the success of others, and gradually, a transition not uncommon in men of this character, into a dealer on a small scale in different works of art.

On leaving Dresden, when Archie was about six or seven years of age, he returned once more to Rome; and here he had his head-quarters until about two years before the present time. He believed himself all this time to be an unhappy man. He knew that the blue Roman sky shone over the six feet of earth where all the best part of himself lay buried. He knew that the present Mrs. Lovell was feebly irritating to him; that he had alienated himself utterly from every tie at home; that the age was passing on, while he neither with pen nor brush had made the faintest indentation upon it; finally, that year by year he seemed to grow more hopelessly foolish in regard of money, both in the getting and the spending. But still in that soft climate, and ever pursuing his own art-studies or his beloved *bricbracquerie*, living a Bohemian life among the Bohemians of all the Italian cities in turn, his temperament

was too essentially an artistic one to allow him to be a very miserable man.

"Third son of Lord Lovell," his wife would say, when deploring her husband's evil ways with any sympathising Englishwoman who came across her path—"third son of Lord Lovell, and connected on his mother's side with the Carstairs; and several delightful livings in the family, if he had only chosen to keep to his profession. And here we live, my dear madam, wandering like felons among papists and foreigners, and all his beautiful literary talents, that might have won him a name in the pulpit, thrown away. If Archie had only been a boy, as they christened her, one of these livings might be kept in the family yet."

"Yes, if I had only been a boy," Archie would chime in at this point of her stepmother's lamentations,—“if I were only a boy, I'd be an artist, like what papa meant to be; or an actor, or musician, or something of that kind; and make a name for us all yet.”

The poor child had been brought up among artists and musicians, and things of that kind; and her ideas of reputation, as of a great many other subjects, were much more artistic than conventional ones.

CHAPTER III.

Brune aux Yeux bleus.

JUST as the Morteville gossips were returning from their evening amusement on the pier, two young men, Englishmen, issued forth arm-in-arm from the Couronne d'Argent, the principal hotel of the place.

The younger of these men was Gerald Durant, Captain Waters's "good thing" at *écarté*, the admirer that Morteville tongues had ascribed to Miss Archie Wilson; the elder was Mr. Robert Dennison, his first cousin, now on his way back to London after a fortnight in Paris, and at the present moment trying, or seeming to try, to persuade Gerald Durant to start with him to-morrow morning by the first boat for Folkestone.

"If there was anything to make you stop in this disgusting hole I would not ask you, Gerald. But as by your own account you don't know a creature to speak to, and are losing twenty pounds regularly to that scoundrel Waters at *écarté*, I can't see why you should be obstinate in spoiling my party for me."

Gerald Durant hesitated. "I believe I should do better to go," he said, after a minute or two; "but as to my absence spoiling your party, the thing's absurd. Markham or Drury would come in a moment, and are as ready, either or both of them, to lose their money at loo as I am; any body in the world you like to ask, in short—except Sholto."

"Markham is out of town; and Lady Lavinia, as you know, never lets that wretched little Drury for a second out of her sight; for Sholto I have no taste—I never had a taste for children. As to losing your money, my dear boy"—Dennison's manner grew genially warm and pleasant—"I don't exactly see the point of the remark. The last time we played loo at my chambers you may remember you landed more than seventy pounds of my money."

"Well, well, I'll go then," said Gerald, in the tone of a man who would rather do anything than be bored to explain why he didn't do it. "It will be better so, I daresay; but I think if you had seen the face which has been the cause of my lingering on here, you would better appreciate my intention of going away."

"Cause! There is a pretty face in it then, after all?"

"Do you think I should poison myself daily at a Morteville table-d'hôte for the pleasure of losing twenty pounds a night to Captain Waters at écarté?" replied Gerald. "Of course there is a pretty face in it; and of course if I stayed I should come to grief, as I always do."

"As you always do!" remarked Dennison with a laugh. "Gerald, by the way that reminds me—although it really is getting no laughing matter—what is Maggie Hall doing? I have been wanting to ask you this long time. Sir John and all of them are beginning to feel their position awkward."

"Who?"

"Maggie Hall, the pretty dairy-maid from Heathcotes. My dear boy, why should you try to have se-

crets with me?" but his tone was not thoroughly collected as he spoke.

"I think you have asked me about Maggie Hall before, Robert," answered Gerald, coldly; "and I told you then that I knew nothing whatever of her. I never had anything to say to Maggie save in the way of friendship; and you, better than any other man, ought to know it."

And he dropped his friend's arm—they were at the entrance to the pier now,—and walking a step or two aside, gazed intently away across the moonlit sands. In the far distance the shadows of two figures—a man and a girl—cut the path of rippling light that fell across the water and Gerald Durant's face. He knew them to be Archie and her father in a second, and began to vacillate again. How fair the pure girlish face must be looking now! If he waited he could easily contrive to meet her somewhere on their way home, steal a word half in play with her as he had done before, and ask her to meet him once more (every mistake in Gerald's life was prefaced by those fatal words, "once more") at that broken garden-wall to-morrow. Why should he give way always to Dennison? He knew very well that he was wanted as a fifth and as a loser at loo; that Dennison cared no more for his society than he did for the society of any stranger he might see for the first time, who would stake his money uncalculatingly. He had taken Dennison's advice times enough in his life, and whenever he had done so had repented it. Besides, the easy assumption of superiority in his cousin's last remark had nettled Gerald excessively. Clever as Robert Dennison was, he over-shot his mark sometimes. Gerald Durant was his infe-

rior in will and in brain; but Gerald was the last man living to like to have the sense of his own inferiority thrust upon him. Show the hand of iron for a moment, and these weak natures rebel from the touch that they would be unconscious of under the silken glove.

"The steamer starts at eleven sharp," remarked Dennison presently; "you will be able for once to get up early, Gerald, eh?"

"Well, yes, I daresay I shall—if I go," answered Gerald; and then he took out his cigar-case, struck a light, and leaning lazily against the parapet of the pier, began to smoke.

Dennison came beside him and laid his hand kindly on his shoulder. "I see how it all is, Gerald," he remarked carelessly, "and I shall say no more about it. Come or stay just as suits your fancy in the morning. Sir John will be glad enough to see you when you do come, you may be very sure. The poor old man is hotter than ever about your standing for L——; and there is no doubt now as to the nearness of the coming election. Parliament has already got nearer to the end of its prescribed term than usual; and if through any extraordinary vitality, or to serve any special policy of the premier, it should survive the autumn, next May for certain must see it legally terminated. What a career is before you, Gerald," he added, affectionately, "if you could only bring yourself to care about it in earnest!—an heiress as devoted as Lucia destined for you from her cradle; an uncle as lenient as Sir John, bent, whether you will or no, upon bringing you into public life." And while he talked thus Mr. Dennison laid his hand within his companion's arm, and gradually led him back into good-temper—no very dif-

ficult matter with a man so facile as Gerald—as they strolled slowly onward down the pier.

Let me speak to you of these two men's appearance as they walk together thus. Of Robert Dennison's first. A stranger seeing them in any position side by side would say that Mr. Dennison must take precedence in all things, even to the chronicling of the colour of his eyes and the length of his whiskers. His whiskers were, I believe, what struck you most when you looked at him. They were irreproachable whiskers,—jet black, without one brown or red hair among them; mathematically correct in growth; long, glossy, thick. Men of weak frivolous character are prone to vacillation in the fashion of their whiskers or beards. Six months in Egypt, a year in Vienna, will upset all the foregone conclusions of these purposeless creatures' lives, and send them back to London regenerate. But from the time when Mr. Dennison first attained man's estate till now—and he was past thirty—the cut and length of his whiskers had remained inviolate. All young women in the housemaid line of life who looked at Robert Dennison pronounced him a very fine gentleman indeed. Such critics are not always bad judges. He was a very fine gentleman; over six feet in his stockings, broad-shouldered, deep-voiced, large-limbed. His head was of the bullet-shape, more often seen in Frenchmen than ourselves; his complexion sallow-olive, his nose small, his teeth short, square, and white almost to singularity. So far the catalogue reads favourably. Now for the features which really constitute a human face (the rest are but adjuncts),—the lips and eyes. Mr. Dennison had lips that made some fastidious natures shrink away with nameless repugnance only to

look at them: full lips, dark in colour, set as granite; the under one slightly projecting, and supported by a heavy coarse-hewn chin. And his eyes were of the worst hue a man's eyes can ever be—black. Through all the infinite gradations of other colours,—through brown, or gray, or green, or (the colour for the gods) blue,—the human soul, whatever there may be of it, shows forth. Only with these black inscrutable orbs does a man look at his fellow-creatures as through a mask. Robert Dennison's eyes were incapacitated, simply by their colour, from giving any softer expression. The broadest sunlight could scarcely evoke a tawny ray from their sombre depths. If you looked at them with closest scrutiny, you could never discern the pupil from the iris; and 'tis precisely in this,—in the shifting colour, in the quick reflection of light, in the sudden dilatation or contraction of the pupil,—that all expression of passion exists. Those who had seen Dennison under the influence of rage—a rare occurrence with him—asserted that his eyes could take a red lurid light, the reverse of agreeable to look at. At all other times they served him, as he was wont in his genial manner to confess, better than any other pair of eyes in the world could have done—they told no secrets of their master. To an archbishop or an orange-girl, to a judge upon the bench or a beggar, those eyes (*occhi neri, fieri e muti*) would have looked with precisely the same hard unflinching expression. And Mr. Dennison was quite right: they suited him.

Gerald Durant was a slight, boyish-looking man of five-and-twenty, with hair of the bright chestnut colour you see surrounding Raphael's softest faces; a fair complexion, that flushed like a girl's as he spoke; and

long silky flaxen moustache and whiskers. When he was without his hat (he had taken it off just now, as he stood watching Archie and her father upon the distant sands), the first thing you noticed in him was his beautiful brow. For a moment—until you saw it was a woman's beauty, not a man's—you would have called that forehead, with its low-growing hair, its delicate mouldings, its marble whiteness, intellectual. For a moment, then, you saw the absence of all the ruggedness, all the force that in a man is intellect. In his youth, a man with a head like this will give promise of great things, and at five-and-thirty he will be living in a villa at Richmond still. His eyes were gray; great speaking eyes, that softened and changed colour if a woman took his hand, or a burst of music smote his ear. His nose and mouth were of the cast Vandyke has taught us to identify with our weakest race of kings; and his chin—at once the characteristic, the index of every face—was characterless. For the rest, his make, although slight, was far from effeminate. Intense desire of excitement was Gerald Durant's master-passion; and he was wise enough to know that field-sports, alternating with the life of cities, are the most epicurean sort of excitement that a civilised man can take. As a boy, he had been stroke-oar of one of the boats and captain of the Eleven at Eton: in later years he had been openly called the boldest rider to hounds in her Majesty's Guards. And any man who is a good rider, and who can handle an oar well, will have his chest well developed. His graceful hands were far too brown and manly-looking to allow a suspicion of dandyism, and his dress was plain and English almost to affectation. At the present moment (and while Robert

Dennison, with a high hat, lavender gloves, swell boots, and frock-coat, looked ready for a wedding) Gerald was in a brown velveteen morning suit, a spun-silk shirt, a Tyrolean hat, and gloveless. "The Guards only dress when they are on duty," he had answered, when Dennison had chaffed him as to his style of costume. "In Bond Street-I do what you are doing now; at all other times I suit myself."

And noting what the undress really was,—how becoming in its picturesque Bohemianism, how studied in every detail of its seeming carelessness,—Mr. Dennison had smiled, but not with his lips, at the answer. All the weakness of Gerald Durant's character lay in it; and nothing yielded Mr. Dennison more intense satisfaction than analysing any new trait of weakness in the men he called his friends.

Towards the middle of the pier they were joined by Waters, who had freed himself from his Morteville associates the moment he saw the two Englishmen approaching. Dennison had already made his acquaintance that day at the table-d'hôte, and began talking to him at once with the kindly tone of encouragement which for some years past it had been his habit to show to all the men or women who preyed upon his cousin Gerald.

"For a few weeks this must be an amusing life to lead, Captain Waters, especially to any one who makes cosmopolitan human nature his study, as I have no doubt you do. I have been on the pier twenty minutes, and have already seen queerer specimens of Britons—male and female—than I ever did during the last fortnight on the Boulevards; and that is saying a good deal."

"Well, they certainly are a tolerably shady lot," answered Waters, with a shrug of his shoulders; "the residents in the place especially. People a shade too bad in character for the Channel Islands—and without ready-money enough to take them to Florence—settle down in Morteville; and a pretty subsidiary stratum they make. The fun is to see them pulling each other to pieces. Women without a shred of reputation between them sitting in judgment on a little girl like this Archie Wilson, as I have heard old O'Rourke, Maloney, and Company doing during the last half hour."

At the name of Archie, Gerald Durant turned his face quickly towards Waters, and Robert Dennison noted the gesture.

"Who is O'Rourke, and what is Archie, Captain Waters?" he asked. "I have rather a fancy when I travel of picking up little everyday bits of watering-place scandal."

"O'Rourke is a decently-successful fifth-class adventuress, who manages to keep herself at the head of the Morteville society. Archie is the daughter of an uncommonly shady Englishman, called Wilson, who has been living here for the last year; she is the prettiest girl in the place; and divides her time equally between running about on the trottoir and smoking cigarettes at an open window late of an evening: a very nice little girl, in short. Nothing but laziness has made *me* neglect her up to the present time."

And Captain Waters smiled significantly. He was implying even a blacker falsehood than he told. Archie Wilson's time was not divided between the trottoir and the consumption of tobacco, although the girl did oc-

casionally walk about the Morteville streets, and in the course of her life had pretended to smoke about half-a-dozen of her own father's cigarettes. On Captain Waters she would have looked (as he knew) with about as much favour as on one of the waiters at the Couronne d'Argent. But what is a trifling statement involving a young girl's fame to a gentleman of his profession in the prosecution of business? Gerald Durant must be detained at Morteville, and according to his lights he (Waters) was doing his best to detain him there.

"And what opinion does the Morteville world pass upon this young person?" Durant asked, after a moment or two. "Do they hit her harder than you do, Waters; or are the trottoir and the tobacco-smoke the worst things that can be brought against her?"

"Oh, as to that," cried Waters, jauntily, but he did not thoroughly understand Durant's tone, "if you come to facts, I daresay the little girl is about the honestest of the whole lot. She runs about alone all day long, and makes eyes at all the men she meets; but what can you expect from a child brought up in such a way as she is, and in such places as these?"

"And she is handsome, doubtless?" suggested Denison; "as all the other women fall foul of her."

"Handsome? Well, no. She'll be a very well-made woman—good hands and feet, and a fine waist, and all that; but lanky at present, and sun-burnt."

"I differ from you entirely, Captain Waters," interrupted Gerald Durant. "I know Miss Wilson slightly; and I think she's very handsome; one of the most handsome girls I ever saw in my life."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Durant," cried Waters,

laughing. He had a trick of calling men by their names at once, however studiously they gave him his title of "Captain", in return. "If I had known that you were an acquaintance of Mademoiselle Archie, I would have been more discreet. Well, she is a very pretty little girl, and not a bit faster, I daresay, although less careful, than her neighbours. Of course, as you have the pleasure of knowing Miss Wilson, you will stop for the public ball to-morrow night? If you do, you should tell me now, and I will get you a ticket. None by strict right are issued after to-day.—That is the time," he added carelessly to Dennison, "to see all our Morteville world at its best. If you care for seeing shady British nature in its full-dress, you ought to stay yourself and go to it."

The hint was carelessly enough thrown out; but it worked as Waters hoped and intended it should work upon Gerald Durant. The fancy rose before him in a moment of Archie; not a little girl running wild as he had seen her hitherto, but flushed, and radiant, and coquettish, in a light ball-dress—a woman, not a child. He felt the slight lithe figure yielding in his arms as he danced with her. He saw the mocking face turned up again with its bewitching nameless charm to his. What did it matter whether his cousin Lucia fretted a little at his absence or not? What did it matter if, for a short time longer, he let things take their course as best they might, without let or hindrance of his? The intoxication of a new fancy was in fact upon him. And it was no custom of Gerald Durant's to cast away the chance of any new emotion for the sake of graver and less pleasant interests.

"You are sure about this ball on Tuesday, I sup-

pose?" he said to Waters when, half-an-hour later, they were separating at the entrance to the hotel. "I mean, you are sure that all the English will be going to it."

"I know that all the O'Rourke set will go," answered Waters; "also Miss Wilson and her mother; for I heard it discussed this evening."

"Oh, well, you may get me a ticket for it, then. I believe I will stop and see the shady Britons in the full dress that you speak of."

"And I am to bear your excuses to Sir John and Lucia?" remarked Dennison, when Waters left them. "Gerald, when will you cease, I wonder, to run about after every pair of foolish eyes that chance to meet you in the street?"

Durant looked up quickly at his cousin's face; but its expression was more adamant than ever in the brilliant moonlight.

"With so much at stake, my dear boy," he went on persuasively, "how can you allow another week to pass without showing yourself at home? I can assure you the time has past for looking upon Sir John's suspicions as a laughing matter. I had a letter from him the day before I left Paris, and really his fierce messages to you are——"

"Matters that concern me, and me alone," interrupted Gerald, with his boyish laugh. "I can understand Sir John being savage under the combined influences of gout and of his own most ridiculous mistake; but why should you be so careful about me, *mon cousin*? I can't hurt you, whatever I do; indeed, I've often thought what a pity it is I don't go utterly to the bad at once, and leave you to a quiet walk over.

You're a much better man than I am in business; and you've got settled political views, which constituents like; and altogether you'd make a vastly steadier heir for Sir John than I ever shall. How about trying it on? I am going to stop here. Most probably I'll get into some mess or other with Mdle. Archie. How about your taking the initiative, and suggesting to the home-powers that Mr. Robert Dennison would be a much more fitting person to receive the intended honours than his scapegrace cousin Gerald Durant? It's worth thinking of, eh?"

To have our own cherished intentions suddenly put into words by the man one purposes to wrong is not a pleasant experience. Robert Dennison was neither weak nor sensitive, nor a conscientious man in the ordinary sense of the word; but he was (like most men off the boards of transpontine theatres) human; and an answer came by no means fluently from his lips.

"I—I am the last man living, my dear Gerald,—the last man living to supplant you with Sir John; and as to Lucia, I believe our dislike for each other is tolerably mutual. What could put such a preposterous idea into your head?"

.... "Brune aux yeux bleus! Why, I do believe it is Archie again," was Gerald's answer. "Yes, there she goes, following the old man up from the pier. If the child hasn't a walk! Robert, tell me if you ever saw a better one among the handsome women in Seville? Why, from here you could swear to the foot she must have. No woman ever walks like that who hasn't a foot arched, small, and firm withal, like a Spanish woman's—

'Si je vous le disais, pourtant, que je vous aime,
Qui sait, brune aux yeux bleus, ce que vous en diriez?'

I shall run the risk at all events;" and in another moment, but with an innocent indolent air, not at all that of a human creature in pursuit of anything, Gerald Durant was following the steps, at about twenty yards' distance, of the two figures he had pointed out to Dennison.

When he had progressed a few steps, he turned and saw that his cousin was still watching him. "Good-night, Robert," he cried, cheerily; "good-by, if I don't see you again; give my love to Lucia; and say I shall certainly be back at the end of the week.

'Si je vous le disais qu'une douce folie
A fait de moi votre ombre et m'attache à vos pieds?'"

And he went on singing half-aloud De Musset's immortal song,—Lucia, his constituency, Sir John, his debts, his hopes—everything else forgotten—until he had followed Archie to within twenty yards of her own house.

CHAPTER IV.

Archie.

SHE was a tall slip of a girl, with a waist that you could span; long-limbed, and with enough of childishness about her still to give her 'that nameless grace that never quite comes back to any woman in her full maturity. In her best black silk—the second dress she had had of regulation-length—and a bonnet, walking demurely by her father's side to church, Archie Lovell looked a grown-up young lady; in her sailor-hat and gingham suit, running wild about the Morteville beach of a morning, she looked a child, and a very wicked child too. Her hair (that Mrs. Maloney called red) was always, save under the Sunday bonnet, left to hang upon her shoulders, as girls of twelve wear it in England—Mr. Lovell averring that it was a sin to let paddings, or pins, or artifice of any kind come near it; and I think he was right. Now that lime- and lemon-juice blanché our women's hair, and that auricomus and other fluids bring it back to yellow or red, one gets sceptical on the subject of gold-tinted locks; but Archie's were of a hue that all the *artistes* in London could never so much as imitate: nut-brown in shade, red-gold in sunshine, supple, plenteous, exquisitely soft, rich, and "kiss-worthy," to use the word of some old poet, always. Her face was a charming one—sunburnt almost to the darkness of her hair, with coal-black pencilled brows, small nose, rather more inclining to *retroussé* than the girl herself liked; a

mouth too large for a heroine, but excellent for a woman—having white short teeth; the perfection of colouring; and that square cut about the corners of the lips that renders any mouth at once passionate and intellectual—the mouth of a poet. Her hands were browner even than her face, but small, strong, and delicately modelled; and her eyes!—ah, here was the crowning fascination of the whole. With dark eyes Archie would have been a pretty sparkling brunette, probably—such a woman as you admire for an evening, and then lose among all the other women of the same colour in your memory; but once see Archie Lovell's blue eyes shining from that brown face, and eyes and face sunk in on your remembrance for ever. They were blue to singularity, like some of those Italian eyes that occasionally startle you just on this side of the Apeninnes: sapphire-blue to their very depths, with crystal-clear iris; and thick lashes—rich, black, and curling up, as you see sometimes on a young child. Could those eyes soften or fill with passion, or were exquisite form and colour all their beauty? No one knew. Archie was a child till last Thursday; and all the expressions her face had worn as yet had been intensely childish ones; rage, when any thing vexed herself or her father; pleasure over a new frock; mischievous delight at “taking rises” out of her simple step-mother; and saucy devil-may-carishness — (I have searched in vain for a loftier expression, but everything heroic is so out of place in speaking of Archie),—saucy devil-may-carishness towards the whole of the Anglo-Morteville population—the female portion of it especially—at all times and seasons when she came across their path.

Till last Thursday. Last Thursday she made the acquaintance of Gerald Durant. He was walking—bored, and trying to kill the hours that hung wearily before the boat sailed—along one of the back-streets of the town, when suddenly he came upon the vision of Archie's face,—a vision destined to haunt his memory through many an after year. She was perched up, not in a wholly lady-like position, on a villanous broken wall that bounded the garden of their landlady's house; no hat on, the wonderful hair hanging loose down her shoulders; a striped blue-and-white shirt, confined round the waist by a strap like a boy's; and a paraphernalia of oil-paints beside her on the wall; for, in her way, Archie had painted ever since she could stand alone. For some minutes she was unconscious of Durant's approach, and worked quietly on at the dead colouring of her sketch, while he stood and fell in love with her. Then he came nearer; and she saw and nodded to him. He was dressed in the same velveteen suit and mountaineer's hat that you have seen him in on the pier; and Archie, unversed in Guardsmen, took him in full faith for a Wanderbursch, and wished him good day in patois German,—a language that she had learnt beautifully three years before among the mountains of Tyrol. He answered in excellent Anglo-Hanoverian, and the girl's cosmopolitan ear told her in a second he was an Englishman. She looked at his hands next; saw he was no Wanderbursch—and blushed crimson? No, reader. In the course of this story I will not once write conventionalities respecting Archie. She blushed not one shade, but began to laugh at the pronunciation, excellent though it was, of the stranger's German; and three minutes later Gerald

had seen her sketch, and was standing chatting to her as freely as if they had just been introduced and waltzed together for the first time at a ball, or undergone any other formal introduction, within the sacred precincts of propriety and social decorum.

They talked on for an hour or more, Archie ever and anon putting in a stroke or two at her unfinished sketch (it was during this time, no doubt, that Gussy Marks espied them); then a French *bonne* appeared at the back-door of the house, who shouted out to *mademoiselle* across the length of the garden that dinner was served; and Durant bowed himself away.

He was as much *épris* as he had ever been in his life. His nature had become a good deal French by frequent residences in Paris and other Gallican influences, and French words best describe many of his moods. Not really in love of course—do Guardsmen ever fall in love?—not flattered, not struck with the desire of hunting down a credit-giving quarry, as was generally the case in Mr. Durant's flirtations—but *épris*. Those blue eyes, that lithe and graceful form, had won his sense of beauty. That unabashed tongue—so childish, yet so keenly shrewd—had stimulated as much intellectual zest as it was in him to feel about a woman. Who and what was this girl, dressed like a boy, painting like an artist, talking like a well-born woman of five-and-twenty, and looking like a lovely child of sixteen?—this young person whose speech would not have discredited a duchess, but who sat perched on the wall of a Morteville back-street, and who nodded and talked to the first stranger who passed her in the road?

He went back to his hotel, told his valet to unpack

his things, and in the evening amused himself by losing his money at *écarté* to Captain Waters. The next morning early he was on the sands; and Miss Lovell was there also, with her father.

She looked at him as she passed, and he raised his hat—Mr. Lovell doing the same mechanically, and without as much as looking at him; and Durant's vanity was wounded on the spot. The girl did not look conscious, nor the father distrustful. What a fool he had been to think for ten minutes of the stupid little bourgeoisie,—a blue-eyed pert young woman, who doubtless planted herself daily on that wall with the express purpose of flirting with any barber or bagman who might chance to pass along the street!

He walked back to his hotel; told his valet to repack his portmanteau at once, and then—then on his way to the pier met Archie (on her road home for a forgotten sketch-book), and stopped and talked to her once more.

She was looking her best—better than she had done the day before—in a fresh white dress, skirt and jacket alike, a sailor-hat bound with a bit of blue ribbon, neat *peau-de-Suède* gloves, perfect little laced boots, and a bunch of honeysuckle in her breast. Gerald got leave to carry her book for her (told his long-suffering valet, whom he past upon the pier, hot with indignation, to take back his things to the hotel), and when he left Miss Lovell within fifty yards of her father on the beach, had made up his mind, as much as he ever made up his mind, to look upon it as a settled affair that he should lose his head about her. This was two days ago. He had seen her and walked with her on the sands more than once since; and Archie

was a child no longer. She was not a whit in love with Mr. Durant,—her heart was as unstirred really as a moorland pool, upon whose surface the imaged flitting clouds give a semblance of agitation; but she had received the deference—had listened to the implied flatteries of a man learned in the science of woman-pleasing, and her imagination, her vanity, her zest in life, her life itself, had got a new and delicious stimulus. She was a child no longer!

The Rue d'Artois was dead silent as Mr. Lovell and his daughter entered their house; and when a few minutes later Gerald, his cigar in his mouth, passed carelessly up the street under the shadow of the opposite houses, he could hear Miss Archie's voice, clear and ringing on the silent night-air.

Mr. Lovell's apartment was on the rez-de-chaussée. The windows and shutters were wide open, and the light of a lamp upon the supper-table showed the family-group with perfect distinctness to any passer-by who chose to look at them from the street.—Mrs. Lovell prim and upright at one end of the table; Mr. Lovell's stooping form and pre-occupied face at the other. Close beside him, radiant in her white dress and with her shining hair, Archie; and walking familiarly about, attending on them, Jeanneton, the great good-humoured French peasant woman, who formed the cook, housemaid, and butler of the Honourable Frederick Lovell's present establishment.

"Fifteen francs is certainly an enormous price," said Miss Lovell, addressing her stepmother with that air of intense indignation seldom seen in women, save where apparel is concerned,—“but they would be the making of the whole dress. A plain white tarlatan is

the best taste in the world for me,—I want nothing better; but then the adjuncts should be perfect. My gloves I'm sure of, for I tried them on early this morning, when my hands were cold; and my wreath will do. But my—no; I don't like to think of it even,—they *would* make such an addition."

"When I was a girl, black slippers were very much worn with white dresses," said Mrs. Lovell; "and very nice they used to look. I was at a ball given by the Honourable Mr. Rawston, of Raby Castle; and the three ladies Vernon were there in white gauze——"

"And black shoes!" interrupted Archie, pertly. "Yes, Bettina, that's all very well, but I'm not one of the ladies Vernon—I'm Archie Wilson; and all the old Morteville ladies hate me; and I wish—yes, I do—to be the prettiest girl at the ball. And if I could have these—well, it's no use talking of it—but if I could, it would just make the difference in my whole dress. I wonder whether M. Joubert would take fourteen francs if I offered it to him—money down?"

"Money down, my dear!" cried Mr. Lovell, waking up suddenly. "What is that you are talking of? Money down! My dear Archie, whatever you do, never fall into any of these horrible innovations. Money down!"

"It would be a great innovation if we were to put it into practice," cried Archie, who evidently was accustomed to make her opinions known in the household. "But for once in my life, father, I do wish I could pay ready-cash. That cruel wretch of an old Joubert, why should he refuse credit any more than any other tradesman? And the only ones that fit me in the place!—I declare I've half a mind to pawn my

ear-rings, and have them. Better be without trinkets of any kind than wear black shoes and a white dress. I hate the thought of it!" and turning up her animated face across her shoulder,—all of which pantomime Gerald was watching,—Miss Lovell here communicated her grief in French to Jeanneton, who immediately broke forth in a loud chorus of indignation and sympathy. Why, even at a ball at the Mairie she (Jeanneton) had worn white shoes. Black shoes and a white dress for 'mademoiselle at mademoiselle's first ball, monsieur! And Jeanneton extended her clasped hands deprecatingly towards monsieur, as though he were a monster of domestic tyranny about to force his innocent child into a convent, or a marriage of convenience. "Mademoiselle's first ball!" reiterated Jeanneton, imploringly.

"But why?—but what do you all mean? Why should not the child have these black boots?"

"White! white! white!" cried Archie, immensely excited.

"Well, then, white boots, if she wishes them. Are not white boots the correct thing for young women to wear at balls?" he continued, addressing Mrs. Lovell: "if they are, let her have them by all means. Poor little Archie!" And he stretched his arm out and stroked her hair caressingly.

If Archie had expressed a wish for a set of diamonds and a white satin dress, Mr. Lovell would have said, "let her have them;" and the girl shot a quick look of sapient intelligence towards her stepmother. "Don't enlighten him," the look said: don't tell him our reputation is so bad M. Joubert won't let me have a pair of white satin slippers on credit—don't tell

him we have only just francs enough to last out next week, and that by dint of somewhat short dinners towards the close of it." Then aloud, "Ah, dear papa, you never deny me anything," she said; "and you'll see if I won't do you credit to-morrow evening—shoes and all. I do hope the young men will pay me attention," she added, quitting the subject of money now that her father had roused himself enough to take part in it. "I only know three; and that's not many to look to for twenty-one dances, is it? Even if they all ask me twice—which one can't be sure of—there's six, and fifteen to sit out. Bettina, I hope I sha'n't sit out fifteen dances."

"Well, my dear, I hope not; but there's never any saying,—men are so capricious. I remember once when I was young——"

"Ah, but that was very different. The Marquis of Tweedle never asked you at all after dancing nine times running with you the night before; but people like M. Gounod are not likely to be capricious. Do you think I could calculate with certainty on M. Gounod asking me three times now?"

M. Gounod was a little French doctor—a bachelor of forty—greatly sought after by all the female population of Morteville; and Mrs. Lovell answered that she thought Archie might certainly rely on a dance with him—a dance perhaps at the end of the evening. As to thinking he could dance with little girls before midnight, with the Maire's two daughters, and the Sous-préfet's wife, and all his influential patients, in the room, it was absurd; unless, indeed, they went very early, and he gave her a quadrille before the other ladies had arrived.

"A pleasant prospect for me!" cried Archie, with a real tremor in her voice, and real tears rising in her eyes; "and after lying awake for nights and nights thinking of this ball, and how jealous I would make old Gussy Marks and all of them by my successes! If —if—" but the supposition lapsed into silence; "if Mr. Durant would only stay and go to it," was what she thought; but for about the first time in her life she felt a shyness at putting her thought into words.

"If little Willy Montacute asks me, I'll dance away half the night with him, at all events," she finished,—after a minute or two. "Anything would be better than sitting by and seeing other people enjoy themselves." And then Miss Lovell took a vigorous heap of *fricandeau* of veal, a goodly pile of salad, an addition of cherry *compote* (she was quite cosmopolitan in her taste for sauces), a gigantic slice of the loaf, and began her supper.

Gerald watched her robust appetite with admiration. The young person he could least love on the earth—her he was engaged to marry—had, before men, a trick of dallying with her food, which exasperated him singularly. What did girls go in for when they abstained from food? Intellectual charms?—the cleverest people eat the most. Physical ones?—to be handsome, the frame of any animal must be well nourished. No such illogical human creature was before him now; but a young woman eating her supper as heartily as a man—ay, and helping herself ever and anon to fresh condiments, and finally to more veal and another trench of bread; and, as I have said, Mr. Durant's admiration increased enormously as he watched her.

When the supper-table was at length cleared by

Jeanneton, Mrs. Lovell reminded her step-daughter in a very serious tone what day of the week it was.

"Sunday evening, Archie, my dear,—Sunday evening, you know."

"Well, Bettina, what of it! Jeanneton may clear the things away on Sunday evening, mayn't she, without sin?"

"Archie dear, for shame! A young girl should never use words of that sort. You know on Sunday evening I always like to attend to our services. We shall have just time for a good quiet reading now before bed-time."

"Not to-night, Bettina,—not to-night," said the girl, gravely, and coming so abruptly to the window that Durant half thought she must have caught a glimpse of his figure before he drew away quickly into deeper shadow. "It isn't that I dislike the readings," she added, in a voice that utterly disarmed poor little foolish Bettina; "when I'm in the mood, I like them better than anything else, I do; but I'm not in the mood to-night; and I won't pretend to read David's grand old words, and all the time be thinking of white-satin shoes and M. Joubert, and my chances of partners at the ball. A cigarette and a walk by moonlight would be much more suitable to my present state of mind."

"Not a cigarette, Archie,—not a cig——"

"Bettina, child, please go to bed, and don't mind me. If I think a cigarette would do me good, I shall smoke one, you may be sure. Now, good night."

"Well, then, Archie, don't put on—you know what I mean. It was very well for once, but you are getting too old for these tricks now; and let

Jeanneton sit at the window, at all events." And then, having apologised away her lecture into simple acquiescence, as usual, Mrs. Lovell lit her bed-candle and went away; and Archie and her father were left alone.

He came up and put his arm round her shoulder. A great gaunt man Durant could see he was, in the moonlight, with narrow stooping shoulders, white delicate hands, and a pale absent-looking intellectual face.

"Archie, my love, Bettina is right—don't go out again as you did last night."

"O, papa, it was such fun!—and knowing all the stories the old ladies would make up; and it was only your coat and hat, papa, after all."

"But still it pained me, Archie,—it pained me when you told us of it."

"I won't do it then. I'll never do it again." Very quick and decided she said this. "Poor little papa, you have quite enough to trouble you without me."

And Mr. Gerald Durant, who was not overburdened with household affections, felt oddly at seeing her take her father's hand and hold it tenderly up against her cheek.

"If you like, I'll go up at once and help Bettina with the reading," she added, after a minute or two.

"Well, well—that's quite another thing," answered Mr. Lovell. "Bettina is a most admirable woman. I'm sure you and I owe her everything, Archie; but her theology is—well, let us say her weakest point—a thing to be accepted, not argued about. To persist in Dissenting manuals, as she does, when all the noblest works of our Church are open to her! No, Archie,

I must say I do not care how often you miss poor Bettina's readings."

The theological difference between her father and his wife has been long patent to Archie; and from the time she was six years old she had known how to make discreet use of them on occasion.

"And you'll make me a cigarette or two before you go?" (Mr. Lovell had a sanctum in which he always spent the early hours of the night.) "Ah, do, papa; it's so jolly to sit here and smoke in the moonlight."

"But you don't like it, Archie?" said Mr. Lovell, as he took out his tobacco and prepared mechanically to obey her. "I can tell by your face, miss, you don't really like your cigarettes a bit."

"Well—*like?*" answered Archie, reflectively; "*like?*—no. I don't suppose I do like the taste, any more than I like the feel of a bonnet; but still I'm quite ready to wear a bonnet on Sunday. It's the ideas of things, I believe, not the things themselves, that are nice—don't you think so, papa?"

"Yes, Archie," he answered, quietly. "And 'tis in the pursuit of the 'ideas of things,' not of things themselves, that men's lives waste away—like mine."

"O, father!—waste away?"

"Waste away, child—and leave no trace, either for bad or good, as they waste."

Archie was silent; and gave a long and wistful look at her father's face. Vaguely it came into her head to speculate whether this was truth indeed that he had spoken; whether a life spent in dreams does not, in the very things left undone, leave as palpable a record of itself—more palpable oftentimes—than

a life of activity and work? But she made no answer. A sort of instinct told her that it was better Mr. Lovell should believe his failures to be harmless ones at least. And, with their money frittered away, herself and her education neglected, their position—ay, and at times the common comforts of life—gone too, the poor child, with premature womanly tact, had long since learnt to be silent whenever Mr. Lovell sentimentalised about himself and his failures.

“You will have finished ‘Troy’ in a few weeks, papa; and then there will be no more talk of failure. I am certain, quite certain, you will get a good price for it in London.”

“Troy” was an enormous and very ambitious landscape, that Mr. Lovell had been working at for years. It was a wonderful combination of such red, purple, and green, as nature never painted yet upon the face of creation; but dear to Mr. Lovell’s heart as ever “Carthage” was to Turner, or perhaps a juster simile, as “The Banishment of Aristides” to poor Haydon.

To Archie this picture was like a brother or sister. It had grown with her growth—every great event of her life, since she was a child of seven, seemed, in one way or another, to be connected with “Troy;” and now that it was within a few weeks of completion, when the artist himself said that more thought, more finish, *could* not be given to this masterpiece of his life, his daughter’s heart fevered tumultuously over its prospects of success or of failure. Childish though the girl was in most other things, in everything pertaining to money her life had already forced her to be wise. Mr. Lovell estimated (who shall say by what tariff?) that “Troy” must fetch five hundred guineas at least.

Five hundred guineas would enable them to pay off the creditors from whom they had run away—for Mr. Lovell in his heart was honest still—to cast aside this incognito that Archie detested so cordially, and to start afresh. (Starting afresh was a process they had passed through—hitherto by the sacrifice of capital—about every year since her birth.) Yes; and suppose “Troy” did not sell? Suppose the picture-buyers in London did not think those marvellous ruby purples more like to nature than Archie in her inmost heart did here in Morteville-sur-Mer? Long after her father had left her, Miss Lovell stood pondering these things; the cigarettes still lying upon the window-sill, the ball, the white satin shoes, Mr. Durant himself, forgotten; and when suddenly a figure emerged into the light close before her, for a second or two she did not even recognise him.

“Miss Wilson, I am afraid I have startled you,” he remarked, as she drew instinctively away from the window, and half hid herself behind the curtain.

“Ah, Mr. Durant! is it you? Well, for a moment I certainly did not know you. I was far away from Morteville—just then—day-dreaming, as I’ve a dreadful habit of doing.” And then she held out her hand—that little bit of a sun-burnt hand, whose modelled proportions were already so graven upon Gerald’s memory—and gave it him.

Affairs were progressing, thought Mr. Durant; the girl had never shaken hands with him before. The papa and mamma retire, and mademoiselle, surprised in a pretty *pose* in the moonlight, gave her hand to him, and returned his pressure heartily. Now was the time to begin serious love-making at once.

Which conclusion shows that a Guardsman, weighted even with seven seasons' experience, may make desperate mistakes occasionally about matters wherein his own vanity is concerned.

CHAPTER V.

A Cigar by Moonlight.

ARCHIE LOVELL seated herself like a child upon the sill of the open window, leant forth her face full where Maloney, had she been there, could have seen it, and told Mr. Durant at once, and without any reserve, that he might go on with his cigar while he talked to her. Mind it?—not a bit. Her father smoked all day and all night long. She had been brought up since she was a baby among people who smoked. Why Bettina, who looked upon a cigar as a capital crime once, had got actually to feel lonely without the smell of smoke now.

“And who is Bettina?” asked Gerald, thinking that domestic confidences would be the kind of conversation most calculated to put the girl at her ease with him.

“Bettina is my father’s second wife,” answered Archie promptly—“Elizabeth, really; but he disliked the name so much, that a German friend thought of Bettina for him—and the most ill-used, long-suffering step-mother in the world. I was three when she came to us,—I am seventeen now; and during these fourteen years I have turned every hair of her head from black to white. Poor little Bettina!”

“Are you so very wicked, then, Miss Wilson?” Gerald asked; “I should not have thought so, I am sure.”

"O, I was an awfully wicked child, I think," answered Archie; "and then I believe I really did take every disease under the sun—Bettina says so, at all events—also that I got into more accidents than any other child extant. Now, of course, it's different. There are no more diseases, as she says, that I can take, and I am too careful and a great deal too fond of myself to get into accidents; so really a good deal of the poor little woman's responsibility is taken away."

The balls had broken in Durant's favour. He could open the first battery of flirtation in an easy orthodox fashion, and without the wearisome necessity of any more of those dreary family histories.

"No other disorder that you can possibly take? I should hardly think that, Miss Wilson, at your age."

"Well, of course, I don't mean cholera or the plague" ("You matter-of-fact young Briton!" interpolated Archie mentally), "but childish ailments—hooping-cough, measles, scarlet-fever, and all the rest of it. Do you understand now?"

"And you don't admit the possibility of any but bodily ailments, then? You don't recognise the existence of mental sufferings?—disappointed hopes, broken hearts——"

"O, I've much too good a digestion, for any nervous affection of that kind," she interrupted with a laugh. "Papa says I shall never know anything about the usual griefs of civilised young women, as long as my magnificent appetite and digestion remain to me."

If the fence was unconscious, it was none the less effective. Gerald saw that he was a great deal farther than he had thought from sentiment still, and resolved for the present to follow rather than lead.

"Civilised young women! Don't you consider yourself as belonging to civilisation, then?"

"Hardly, Mr. Durant; or only in the same sort of way that gipsies do. Now, look;" she just touched his sleeve with her hand, and leant her face forward confidentially to his; "look here; as long as I can remember anything, we've been living about in Italy, but never longer in any place than a year or so at a time. We have always been much too poor for any English people to want to know us, and my father's friends everywhere have been artists—artists, and actors, and musicians, and republicans, and all those sorts of men, you know. For the rest, we generally know our butcher and our baker—till our credit gets too bad for us to want to keep up the acquaintance—and occasionally the English parson, but not his wife or daughters, to bow to; sometimes the doctor; and that's about the extent of our dealings with the Philistines. I've never been to school; I haven't an accomplishment belonging to me, except dancing (which I learnt by instinct, I suppose); and I've scarcely known an English child to speak to since I was born. Now, am I civilised or not?"

"Very," answered Gerald laconically, and looking long at the refined high-bred face so close to him there, alone at this hour and by this light; yet fenced round, divinely shielded, by its own unconsciousness of evil as few faces had ever seemed to him in London ball-rooms. "You have been in Rome, of course, among all the other Italian cities?" he remarked, as the girl returned his look with a thorough want of embarrassment, that to him was more singularly embarrassing than any shyness would have been.

"Yes, we actually lived in Rome for nearly two years once; and we looked upon it as head-quarters, or home, all the time we were in Italy. It is home to papa, I think; or more home than anywhere else could ever be."

"The Roman artist-life suited him, I suppose?"

"Ah, no, Mr. Durant. His heart is in Rome—just that!"

The colour ebbed up into Archie Lovell's face; her breast heaved. "Mamma is buried there, you know," she whispered, in a suddenly softened tone. "She was quite a girl when papa married her, and she died a year after their marriage. He has really never lifted up his head since. All his pictures and his poems—poor papa!—even I myself, are nothing compared to her and that one year they lived together. I used to feel miserably jealous, Mr. Durant, at the number of hours he would spend sitting beside her grave in Rome; and I hope I shall never go back there to be made jealous any more. All the years he has had me ought to be more to him than that one little year with her. And yet," she added in a minute, and with another subtle change of voice, "I can understand it all. I should feel the same myself. Mamma was everything to him."

Here, then, was the subject of love fairly brought upon the carpet—the girl's own capacity, not for love only, but for passionate overwhelming love, openly acknowledged; and still Gerald Durant felt that he was as remote from intimacy with her as though the Alps divided them. No woman, learned or unlearned, ever paved the way to facile flirtation by making such a declaration as this. The siege, if siege it were to be,

must be a long one, ending possibly—already he estimated Archie truly enough to know this—not as his flirtations had ended hitherto, but in his own utter defeat and subjugation. If this girl's changeful wooing voice had once got fairly round his heart,—if those little hands once held him in absolute thrall, he knew himself, in some mad hour, to be quite capable of marrying her. And to marry any woman save the one destined for him would be, in his fettered position, simply to throw life up of his own free will. Lucia Durant he must take for his wife, no matter whether other faces were fairer to his sight, other voices sweeter to his ear.

Marry! Heaven, where was his imagination leading him? and what was this girl but a pretty precocious child, whom it was pleasant to play at love-making with here in the moonlight, possibly dance half the night with at the Morteville ball to-morrow, and then go away and forget? And he looked at her again, and saw that the child was prettier far than he had ever given her credit for, with her great blue eyes softening, half in tears, and the full-cut mouth trembling: thought, feeling—yes, dormant passion even—stirring over all the flower-like childish face.

"Your father is a happy man, Miss Archie, whatever else he has lost."

"Why, please?"

"He has got you."

"He has; and a precious trouble and anxiety I have been to him," she answered, going back abruptly to her usual manner. "How in the world did you know I was called Archie?"

"I—I—well, really I don't know. Did you never

tell me so yourself?" He could not for his life have brought his lips to say that Waters had spoken of her.

"Perhaps. I don't remember. But however you heard it, once would be enough, I'm sure, to impress it on your mind. Did you ever hear such a name for a girl in your life before? 'Archie!' And it's not a diminutive, not a pet name; I was christened it. Shall I tell you how? When I was five or six weeks old, my mother dead, and poor papa in his worst grief, some English ladies who lived in the house took it into their heads I ought to be christened, and teased him as to what my name was to be. He says he remembers he pushed a book of my mother's across the table, and said 'her name,' and left them. It had been a gift of her brother's, and had these words written in it: 'Pauline, from Archie.' Well, of course I don't know what these excellent women thought, or how they managed it, but at all events they chose the most English of the two, and I was christened Archie instead of Pauline, as papa meant. Do you hate it?"

"On the contrary," answered Gerald; "I like the name infinitely, because no woman I have known before has borne it."

"I am glad of that. I think sometimes my name alone would set people against me, even if I didn't look so much like a boy, and smoke cigarettes, and—"

"Miss Wilson! you don't mean to tell me you smoke—actually smoke? No, no. Impossible."

"I assure you I do. Here are two cigarettes papa made for me just now. Are you shocked?"

"Fearfully."

"What! did you never see a young lady smoke

in your life before?" cried the girl, looking intensely amused.

"Never," answered Gerald, with the air of a Quaker. "I have lived among good, demure, quiet young ladies, I can assure you—young ladies who have never seen a cigar, save by accident, and don't know the meaning of the word pipe."

"O, dear, how good they must be, and not at all tiring to live with! Is it one of their portraits you wear in that locket *par hasard?*" making this unexpected home-thrust with the thorough audacity of a child; "if it is, show it me. I should like to see how good, demure, quiet young ladies look who never saw a cigar, except by accident."

Without a word, Gerald disengaged the locket from his chain, and Archie seized hold of it and ran off eagerly to the lamp. A strong magnifier of Mr. Lovell's was lying on the table; and after opening the locket and finding that it did contain a photograph, and a photograph of a girl's face, Archie examined it through the glass with eager attention. For a moment something in the expression of the portrait repulsed her strongly; then her artistic eye discerned the accurate statuesque proportions of the features, the classic cut of the small head, the soft moulding of the fair and stately neck; and finally, with a sinking of the heart utterly beyond her own power of analysis, she felt herself bound to acknowledge that this woman, whose portrait Gerald Durant wore on his breast, was beautiful.

All Archie's foregone beliefs in herself seemed revolutionised at this moment. Accustomed to hear the open opinions of her father and his friends as to her looks, she had simply and gladly believed herself to

be handsome—an hour ago had spoken with assurance of being the prettiest girl at the Morteville ball to-morrow. What did she seem in her own sight now? A wild gipsy child—a picturesque model perhaps, with bright tawny hair, a pair of blue eyes, and not another good feature in her face. Pretty? Why, this girl she was looking at was simply exquisitely faultless. The line of face a delicate oval; a small irreproachable nose; a small irreproachable mouth; hair so fair as to look fair even in a photograph, brought down low and with mathematical accuracy upon the forehead; a slender throat, gracefully turned aside; soft eyelids, modestly downcast (perhaps because Miss Durant thought it decorous for her eyes to evince no expression in a portrait taken for her cousin, perhaps because the photographer knew that their want of colour would tell if he attempted them upraised); every line exquisitely faultless, in short.

But it was not the beauty of the features alone—not the irreproachable nose and mouth, and Madonna-like downcast eyes; it was the indefinable propriety—I search for and can find no other word—of the whole picture, even to the narrow bit of velvet, from which a black cross depended precisely in the centre of the slender throat, that struck Archie with such a sense of pain. She had herself been photographed by half the artists in Italy, but always in wild unstudied attitude, with careless drapery, with hair unbound—as “Undine,” as “Graziella,” as a peasant child, a nymph, a contadina; but ever, as she felt now, with new and bitter shame, as a “model.” This was how an English girl of her age and of her birth ought to look in a picture. This was what a man like Gerald

Durant meant when he spoke of good, demure, quiet young ladies; and with a stiff, altered manner, that he was not slow to notice, she went back to the window and returned him his locket.

"Your friend is very beautiful, Mr. Durant. There is not a fault in her face, and I should stifle if I lived in the same house with her. I thank you for showing me her picture."

"Well, I suppose she *is* beautiful," answered Gerald, refastening the likeness coolly to his chain; "beautiful as a statue, and as cold! I always fancy my cousin Lucia—did I tell you she was my cousin?—must be like Rowena. You have read *Ivanhoe*?"

Yes, Archie had read *Ivanhoe*, and Paul and Virginia, and *The Newcomes*. They found them in some lodgings they had in Padua once; and she remembered all about Rowena very well.

"The same kind of blonde, gentle, negative, unimpeachable woman," went on Gerald, looking away from Archie as he spoke. "Don't you remember feeling how much better poor *Ivanhoe* must have loved Rebecca in his heart?"

"I remember that *Ivanhoe* married Rowena," answered Archie laconically. "It didn't matter much to Rebecca, after that, which he loved."

And then there was a silence,—the first silence there had ever been yet between them; broken at length by Miss Lovell trying to say something cold and formal about its being past eleven, and how she had promised Bettina not to stay up late to-night.

"And I shall meet you at the ball to-morrow?" asked Gerald, throwing away the end of his cigar, and moving slightly nearer to his companion.

"The ball! O, Mr. Durant, will you really be there? I *am* so glad: I thought you were going away to-morrow morning." And her face flushed all over with pleasure, like a child's unexpectedly entranced by the advent of a new toy.

"Perhaps you will not be so glad to-morrow evening," Mr. Durant remarked. "I rely upon your giving me a great many dances, Miss Wilson."

"I—give *you* dances? dance with you, do you mean? O, thank you!" Archie's eyes sparkled anew with delight. "Willy Montacute and M. Gounod are the only other dancers I can really depend upon," she added with her usual sincerity; "and I don't want to sit out a single dance. I will dance with you as often as you ask me; and I'll make Bettina go early, so that you won't be able to get engaged before you see me."

And she let her hand rest in his at parting, and leant her head out, smiling, to look after him in the moonlight, and gave him a last salutation, full of meaning and friendliness, as he stopped and looked back at her before turning out of the Rue d'Artois.

"Poor little girl!" thought Gerald magnanimously, when, five minutes later, he was standing smoking his last pipe outside the door of the hotel. "Rouse her jealousy, give her vanity a chance of gratifying itself, and she would be a woman, and as disappointingly easy to win as all other women! As lucky for her as for the duration of my own fancy for her, perhaps, that I am going away so soon."

"Give him dances!" thought Miss Lovell, as she laid her head upon her pillow. "Why, of course I will—every dance on the list if he chooses. I like him.

When you see him close, his dress is cleaner than most men's" (Archie had been brought up among foreign artists, remember). "Not too much brains in his head perhaps, but a handsome *malerisch* face,—and just the height for a partner. I must have those white shoes of old Joubert's now. Mr. Durant shall never tell his cousin that he danced with a girl in France who wore black shoes and a white dress at a public ball. Fourteen francs! If the old wretch would only take off one, I've got five francs in my purse already, and perhaps Bettina—" And then Miss Lovell was asleep.

If her vanity was touched, her heart up to the present moment was most entirely unscathed; more unscathed than the Guardsman's, if the truth must be told.

CHAPTER VI.

Robert Dennison's Secret.

"MAGGIE HALL! Tell my nephew Gerald that I will no longer allow the mystery about this woman to rest. Tell him, also, that I desire to see him at once, and that this is the last opportunity of explanation he will be likely to have with me."

Maggie Hall. As Robert Dennison walked up and down the breakfast *salle* next morning, waiting for Gerald to appear, and with his uncle's open letter in his hand, the name Maggie Hall *would* force itself with horrible obstinacy upon his mind. Already he felt that this woman, whom six months ago he had loved with blind unreasoning passion, was a barrier in his path, a blot upon his name, an incubus upon his whole future life: and every time he thought of her thus, an unspoken curse rose in Mr. Dennison's heart. Give this message to Gerald; go home, and with well-varnished face assure Gerald's uncle and affianced wife, as he had done before, that he hoped—nay, was sure—they did his cousin wrong,—that matters yet would not turn out so badly as they supposed; keep Gerald, if possible, apart from them still on his return to London,—ay, and how long could all this wretched farce continue to be acted out? Would any woman, would Maggie least of all, with her uneducated mind, her suspicious wilful temper, consent to be kept out of sight, alone, and with a blackened character for ever?

In one of the bursts of passion that had become so frequent of late, might she not any day proclaim to the world how low he, Mr. Robert Dennison, had stooped? Low in that he had made her, an ignorant peasant-girl, his wife; doubly, trebly low in that he had not rescued Gerald from the first suspicion of the dishonour (for dishonour he had now begun to think it) that was indeed his own?

Every man, I suppose, who ever did a bad deed has felt, on looking back to that deed, that he drifted into it originally by imperceptible currents; that, however it might have been later, the first beginnings of the evil were wrought by influences beyond and out of himself. Robert Dennison felt this now. He was entangled in a labyrinth of present falsehood. His worldly prospects, his ambition, the things dearest to him in life, were in jeopardy; every thing as bad with him as it could be. And why—and how? Because a beautiful peasant-girl had been thrown across his path; because this girl's passionate regard for him had won, first his pity, afterwards his love, and then, in a moment of weakness, but of honour—this he never wearied of reminding himself—he had made her his wife! Could he help it if scandalous country tongues had fastened upon a wrong man with whom to associate this girl's disappearance? Weighted as he was with the horrible reality, was it any very great guilt to allow his cousin to bear, for a few weeks or months, the imputation, only, of the *mésalliance*? Could he help it if, in the mean time, Gerald's own people should look coldly on him?—if Gerald's prospects should really suffer a little through the imputation? Why, the fellow was sure to be ruined some day. He had been walking straight to

ruin ever since he left school, years ago. A scandal more or less about such a man mattered nothing; while an imputation against a white immaculate repute like his, Robert Dennison's, would be death. And if only a few short years could be lived through quietly—if Gerald were once fairly where fools and spendthrifts ought to be—might not he be taken into Sir John's favour, come into Parliament, become his heir in the sight of the world? Nay, with Maggie educated, and the first fresh scandal as to her lowly birth forgotten, might not even this wretched marriage of his be "got over?"

He was deep in the speculation still, his eyes gloomily bent upon the floor as he paced mechanically up and down the room, when Gerald himself, *débonnaire*, merry, careless, the snatch of a French love-song on his lips, sauntered in at the door. And then Mr. Dennison, after hastily putting his uncle's letter out of sight, walked straightway up to his cousin's side, and laying his hand heartily upon his shoulder, bade him good-day. He had always had a kind of elder-brother manner with Gerald, and this duty that he was going to perform now made it more than ever necessary for him to assume it.

From this point on, the story will, I hope, tell itself, without further need of retrogression; but, for clearness, I should here describe with more detail than I have done the exact worldly position in which these two men—Robert Dennison and Gerald Durant—stood to each other. They were first-cousins—Eleanor Dennison, Robert Dennison's mother, having been a Miss Durant, and consequently equally near, as far as blood went, to old Sir John Durant, of Durant's Court, the

present head of the family, and the relation to whom both of the young men had been taught to look for their advancement in the world.

Equally near in blood, but, as Robert Dennison in bitterness of spirit was forced to confess, widely remote in their place within the old man's heart. Married to a woman who suited him, rich, the possessor of health and all other prosperity, the death of his only son in infancy had been the one bitter drop in Sir John Durant's cup. He had not felt the loss at the time more than other men feel such bereavements; but every future year as it passed by, leaving him without prospect of another heir, made him feel how wide a blank that little baby's death had, indeed, left in his life! At length, twelve years later, another child was born to him; and in his intense joy at the sight of the little face—come, as he said, to gladden his old age—the unwelcome fact that this second child was only a girl was almost forgotten. His favourite brother had in those intervening years married and died, leaving a motherless boy, who at the time of Lucia's birth was five years of age, the inmate of Sir John Durant's childless house, and as near his heart as anything not actually belonging to himself could be. This boy was Gerald; and long before Lucia could walk alone, her father had finally made up his mind as to the fitness of marrying her to her cousin.

"Failing this boy, I will make Robert my heir," he would say to his wife, and ignoring the possibility of his daughter's, not of the boy's, death. "Yes; Robert should take the name of Durant, of course, and we would marry her to him. Any way, my children's

children shall bear the name of Durant, although Heaven has willed that our own son should be taken from us."

Instead of failing, Gerald grew up strong and hearty; and Lucia Durant, a poor delicate, over-physicked little girl, struggled up also to maturity. It was just as settled a thing about their marriage still as it had been when one was two years of age and the other seven. Not a word of love had certainly ever passed between them. In the first place probably, because they did not love each other; and in the second, because Lucia's mother was not a woman to countenance love-making, however legitimate, within her walls.

"I never thought of such a thing until after I married your father," was what Lady Durant would say to her daughter. "Demonstrations of feeling during engagement are, in my opinion, perfectly unnecessary. Any well-feeling woman must grow to like her husband after marriage."

And Lucia was quite of a nature to receive her mother's opinions on the subject of love as final. She was to be Gerald's wife when she was twenty-one; Gerald was nicer than Robert; and she was quite content that her papa had decided upon him. She was glad when Gerald was at the Court, but not broken-hearted in his absence; and this was about as much feeling as Miss Durant had hitherto entertained in the matter.

By hitherto I mean until within six months of the present time. Then occurred the disappearance of Maggie Hall, one of the Dairy servants at the home farm of Durant Court; and Gerald Durant, vaguely at first, but gradually with more and more frequency, was named about the county as having in some way been

cognisant of her flight. The very suspicion was a horrible blow to the quiet family at the Court. Old Sir John had looked with leniency upon all Gerald's shortcomings heretofore, seldom speaking of them even to his wife, and when he was forced to do so, using euphemisms which of necessity disarmed Lady Durant's indignation against her scapegrace nephew—no difficult matter, if truth must be told; for, in spite of all her skin-deep prudery, of all her theological orthodoxy, Lady Durant was a very woman in matters of affection, and held the prodigal son in her heart dearer immeasurably than Robert Dennison, with all his prudence and all his virtue. But here was no young man's wildness, no thoughtless extravagance, no evil that a few hundreds or thousands of pounds could, as in all former instances, set right. If Gerald had done this thing that was imputed to him, the old man felt that now, indeed, were his gray hairs to be brought with sorrow to the grave. And bitter and hard words did he use as he enjoined his daughter to hold no communication, save as a friend, with her cousin; to banish from her breast the recollection that he had ever been her lover, until such time as he chose to prove his innocence before the world.

And then Lucia Durant first began to feel, in spite of all the excellent education of nearly twenty-one years, that her heart did throb with some feelings of natural indecorous regard towards the man they had destined her to spend her life with. There was no passion, little outward energy in the girl's temperament; but she possessed the quiet sort of obstinacy not unfrequent in very gentle, very seemingly submissive women; and in those dull winter days, when the blow

first fell, and while the old people mourned aloud, Lucia Durant used to sit, her eyes calmly bent over her embroidery, steadfastly resolving that now her cousin Gerald had fallen into ill repute she would hold by him till death. She never really believed him to have played any part in Maggie's disappearance; but, whatever she had believed, I fancy she would still have pleaded for him with her father. Her world of men consisted solely of Robert Dennison and Gerald. One of these two she knew was to be master of herself and of her money. And in the deep-rooted, stifling repugnance that Robert's superhuman virtues had ever inspired her with, she almost felt as though she could have forgiven any earthly sin in the prodigal Gerald. Children brought up on admirable but artificial systems, as Lucia Durant had been, not unfrequently break out into this kind of instinctive rebellion when the time for action comes.

"And why don't we suspect Robert?" the poor child had once mustered courage to say, when her father had been summing up, fearfully hard, against his absent nephew. "Robert was a great deal more attentive to Maggie Hall than Gerald. Robert went abroad too at the time. Robert can only give his word, as Gerald does, to prove his innocence."

"But Robert is not a man to commit such an action," answered her father testily. He would have given half he possessed to know at the moment that Maggie Hall was Robert's wife. "Robert may not have the soft manners that please foolish girls like you, Lucia. He does not read Tennyson in a murmuring voice, and quote Burke about the days of chivalry, and spend his life holding silk for young ladies to wind.

But he is a plain upright man of honour; he is more, he is a man of the world, and possesses the ambition that makes a man true to himself and to his family. Robert Dennison throw away his prospects for the sake of a dairy-girl's pretty face!" the old man had added, in a tone which expressed tolerably clearly what sort of affection he had for the plain upright man of honour who would risk neither his own prospects nor the fair name of his family.

And Lucia was dutifully silent; and, two days later, sent Gerald the photograph of herself that he now wore—and showed to other young ladies when requested—upon his watch-chain.

"If she had loved me, she had certainly been less just," he remarked lightly to Robert Dennison. "The most convincing proof you can possibly have of a woman's indifference is, when she behaves to you with generosity." The two young men were seated together at breakfast now; and Robert Dennison with little difficulty had brought the subject round to Gerald's difficulties with the family at the Court. "Imagine any girl really loving a man—do the scoundrels pretend to say this is Lafitte?—really loving a man, and yet listening to reason, where another woman is in the case! Not that I am sorry. Poor little Lucia! the best thing for her, and for me too, is that she should not care for me overmuch."

"But you still adhere to the old idea of making her your wife?" asked Dennison, with a quick scrutiny of his cousin's careless face.

"Adhere to the old idea! Why, what are you talking of, Robert? Of course I adhere to it. How can I do anything but marry Lucia? Three thousand a-

year (and Lucia herself, poor child!) will be pleasant adjuncts to the old place and the old name; neither of which could Mr. Gerald Durant keep up for one week, if he came into them without any other help than his own resources."

"And you don't look upon Sir John's present temper, as of consequence, then?" said Robert Dennison. "You feel quite as sure of his consent to the marriage now as you did a year ago, before all this took place?"

"Quite," answered Gerald calmly. "If the old man had taken umbrage at any of the manifold sins of my youth, I might feel differently; but I don't even trouble myself to think of a sin I have not committed. Heroines never finally disappear, except through trap-doors at the Adelphi, now-a-days. I am as certain of Maggie Hall turning up and acquitting me with her own lips as I am of eating this piece of really excellent pie now." And as he spoke, Gerald conveyed a goodly portion of the *pâté de foie gras* in question into his mouth.

"I'm glad you take it all so quietly," remarked Dennison, with an uncomfortable smile. Was that last remark with respect to Maggie Hall a likely one to make him comfortable? "But still I must tell you, that if you were less indifferent in the matter, I think it might be better for you hereafter. I am an older man than you, Gerald; and this I will say, I think appearances are deucedly against you with regard to Maggie Hall."

Gerald laid down his knife and fork, and the blood rose up angrily into his fair thin-skinned temples. "Very well, Robert. You said something like this to

me on the pier last night, and now I'll tell you what I think. I think appearances are deucedly against *you* with regard to Maggie Hall."

Robert Dennison laughed genially. Once brought into the territory of bold falsehood, and this man felt himself more at home than in the delicate border-ground that separates falsehood from truth.

"Appearances against me! Well, I like that. I certainly never expected to hear myself accused of a folly of this kind. Without pretending to transcendental virtue, eloping with a milk-maid is decidedly not one of the pleasant vices into which I should be likely to fall."

"No, I don't think it is, under any ordinary circumstances," answered Gerald laconically. "It is, I confess, one of the last things I should have accused you of; but unfortunately facts are sturrier things than theories. You said appearances were deucedly against me with regard to Maggie Hall, and I answered that I thought they were deucedly against you. I think so still, Robert; indeed, if we are going to speak the truth to each other, I may as well tell you I thought so from the first. You know as well as I do that I never admired Maggie except as a man must admire every pretty woman, empress or milkmaid, that he comes across; and I know as well as you do that you admired her very differently. Admired! come, I may as well say the word out—that you were as head-over-ears in love with Maggie Hall as she was with you. I can say nothing stronger."

"Gerald, really—"

"Now, my dear fellow," cried Gerald, resuming his knife and fork, and his anger vanishing, as all his

emotions had a trick of doing, in a moment, "don't let us spoil our breakfast by entering into any absurd discussion on the subject. You were in love with this young woman, and probably know pretty well where she is at this moment. I was not in love with her, and do not know where she is. *Voilà!* There is no more merit on one side than on the other. The whole thing resolves itself into a simple question of taste. Only don't let us go through the trouble of any useless mystifications when we are without an audience, as now."

"I think, when you talk in this airy way, you forget one slightly important point of which I spoke just now," remarked Robert Dennison; but he kept his eyes on his plate as he said this. "Maggie Hall is reported to be married. Even, with your catholic ideas in all things, you must allow that to be accused of having married her is serious."

"Serious to him whom it concerns," answered Gerald, "but to me of most supreme unimportance. Maggie Hall is certain to turn up again; if she is married, as report says, so much the better for the man who has the happiness of possessing her. Any way, I shall be clear. It's no use arguing with me,"—he went on, as Robert Dennison was about to speak,—"I'm just as great a fatalist as ever, and just as much convinced of the utter folly of attempting to hinder or forward any event of one's life. If I am to marry Lucia, I shall marry her. If I am to be disinherited, I shall be disinherited. The gods alone know which would be the happiest lot, but I can look forward equally cheerfully to either."

And having now finished an admirable breakfast,

Gerald Durant took out his cigar-case, and, retiring to an American lounging-chair beside the open window, prepared for his morning's smoke. "Don't tell Lucia that I stopped to dance with a little girl at a Morte-ville ball," he remarked, when the first few puffs of his regalia had borne away his thoughts again to Archie. "Great as my faith in Lucia is, I think that is a trial to which no woman's constancy, no woman's long-suffering, should be exposed."

Robert Dennison was still lingering over the breakfast-table—it was one of his "principles" never to smoke in the forenoon—and at this moment had taken out, unremarked by Gerald, and was reading again his uncle's letter.

"Tell Gerald that I will no longer allow the mystery about this woman to rest. Tell him also that I desire to see him at once, and that this is the last opportunity of explanation he will be likely to have with me."

Should he deliver that message of his uncle's in its strict integrity? Mr. Dennison pondered. Honour bade him deliver it, certainly. When he saw the old man next he would have to pledge his word that he had done so. But was it matter of certainty that it was politic to himself to play thus with the cards upon the table? He had hinted at the substance of his message, and Gerald had scoffed, in his usual fatalistic way, at its importance. Was there really need to do more? If Gerald heard the message itself, ten chances to one that, roused by its tone, he would obey Sir John's wishes on the spur of the moment; and once face to face, in the present temper of both, Dennison knew enough of human nature to be sure that Gerald and

Sir John Durant would be likely to come fatally near the truth in their suspicions. As his cousin seemed so happy running after this last fancy of his in Morteville, why hurry him away against his will? He confessed that he held it folly for any man to attempt to hinder or forward a single event of his life. Well, let him have the benefit of his own creed, and chase after butterflies when every serious interest of his life was trembling in the balance. He, Robert Dennison, had done his duty in hinting to him that he ought to be in England. Did Sir John actually bind him to show the message in black and white? and might not the delay even of a few more days possibly bring some good turn to himself, if in the meantime the guilt only remained safely lodged upon the shoulders where it already lay?

At this point of his meditation Robert Dennison returned the letter to his pocket, rose from the table, and came up to his cousin's side. "What were you saying about dancing at a ball, Gerald? You don't mean to say, with the thermometer at eighty, that you are really going to a Morteville ball to-night?"

"I mean not only to go, but to dance like a student at Mabile."

"With the little girl you ran after in the moonlight last night?"

"With the little girl I ran after in the moonlight last night."

"Her name is—"

"Her name is Wilson, Robert. Are you arranging in your mind how to break these dreadful tidings to Lucia?"

"I was envying you your delightful freshness of

heart, Gerald. After eight — nine years — whatever it is — of such a life as yours, to find zest still in pretty little flirtations with good young ladies of seventeen!”

“I don’t marry them, whatever else I do,” said Gerald lightly, but looking up full and suddenly into his cousin’s face. “Robert, I’ve been thinking as well as you during the last five minutes, and I’ll tell you the conclusion I’ve come to.”

“About — about what?” cried Dennison, with an affectation of indifference — “about the cut of your next coat, or whether you will wear white gloves or lavender at the Morteville ball to-night?”

“No; about neither, my friend. I have been thinking about Maggie Hall; and that it would be a vast deal better for all of us, for me in particular, that the truth should be spoken at once. Maggie is your wife.”

Mr. Dennison’s dark face changed colour by the faintest shade; but neither his eyes nor mouth betrayed token of emotion or surprise.

“We spoke of this just now, Gerald, and finished with the subject, I thought. Don’t re-open it, if you please.”

And he took out his watch, and added something about the punctual starting of the steamer.

“The steamer goes at eleven,” said Gerald. “You have half-an-hour still, and what I have to say won’t take five minutes. Maggie is your wife, Robert. She wrote to me, a week after your marriage, and told me all.”

“She — she never dared do it!” cried Dennison. “Show me the letter — she never dared write to you, and make such a statement,” he added quickly.

"I cannot only show it you, but give it you," said Gerald quietly. "God knows I don't want to be in possession of it, or any other evidence of your secret. As to daring," he added, "I think she acted pretty much as most women would have done. You were taken suddenly ill in Paris, you may recollect; and knowing me better, or being less afraid of me than the rest of us, she wrote this letter. What would you have her do, Robert? Write and say that she was with you, but not your wife? Spartan generosity that; not to be expected from any woman in the present age of the world."

"And you obeyed the summons?" asked Dennison; but more to gain time than because he cared to hear the question answered.

"No. Before I had time to start I got another note—you shall have them both—telling me that you were better, and imploring me never to tell you—poor child!—that she had written. Here they are, Robert; and I can tell you I shall feel a great deal more comfortable when I have got rid of them, and of the secret too. Keeping things dark is not, and never has been, a forte of mine."

And taking a porte-monnaie from his breast-pocket, Gerald opened it, and took out two little notes, which he handed over to his cousin.

Yes: they were hers. No mistake about that cramped, uneducated hand—those complicated, ill-worded sentences. And the first of them was signed, large and distinct, "Margaret Dennison." It was the first time Robert had ever read that name—for in writing to himself she knew too well to sign it in full—and a flush of mingled anger and shame rose up over his dark face.

"Now, mind, I don't want to know anything more than you choose to tell in the matter," cried Gerald. "The only thing I care about is, that I shouldn't be incriminated too deep; and perhaps the time has come when something ought to be said. You're the man to say it, Robert. You must set me right—but in any way you like—with Sir John and the rest of them."

"And—and you've never said a word about it before, then?" exclaimed Dennison, stung horribly by this generosity from a man whose frivolous nature he had always, both to himself and to others, pretended to despise.

"Can you ask me? Of course I have not. Of course you are the first and only person to whom I should think of opening my lips about it. I was awfully sorry, Robert—awfully sorry; I don't mind confessing it; for, after all, birth——however, there's no good talking now. And when first I heard that I was accused in the matter, I thought it might be all for the best to remain quiescent for a time—I mean until Sir John had at least accustomed himself to the idea of one of his nephews being Miss Hall's husband. It really isn't the same thing after all," he added, ignorant how cruel a blow his words inflicted upon Dennison; "I mean as you were never meant to marry Lucia, or anything, there is not half such a weight of guilt on your shoulders as there would have been on mine; indeed, I don't see what Sir John Durant or any other man has got to say at all on the subject of your marriage."

"Assuming the marriage to be a fact," said Dennison quietly; but taking very good care to put the letters safely into his pocket as he spoke.

"Assuming the marriage to be a fact!" repeated Gerald with emphasis. "You don't mean to tell me I am wrong in that assumption?"

"I mean to thank *you* heartily for the way you have acted," was Robert Dennison's answer. "Whether Miss Hall's statement had truth in it or not," he half laughed, "is a question that the future will decide. You believed it; and you have behaved like the good generous fellow you always were, Gerald, and I shall never forget it, come what may. For the rest, rely on my doing all that ought to be done—all that perhaps I ought to have done long ago—as far as you are concerned. You will not bear me any ill-will for having tacitly joined in your condemnation hitherto?"

"Ill-will, Robert? Not I. I only know that you or any man must have been deucedly hard-placed before taking the trouble of trying to keep the thing secret at all."

"And if—if I find that the only way to turn Sir John's suspicions away from you is to compromise the girl herself, I may leave the matter as it is for a few days more, then?—till you return, at all events? You can understand, my dear Gerald, that—without for a moment admitting the truth of what these letters state—I may be in a position in which a single hasty step might do me an incalculable injury."

"I think, as I said before, Robert, that you are in a position where plain speaking would be the best for us all," answered Gerald. "But on one point you may feel thoroughly at your ease: I give you my honour to say no word of all this to Sir John, under whatever

circumstances I may find myself, until you choose that it shall be known."

And then, considerably to the relief of both, a servant came in with Monsieur's bill, and to announce that time was up; and a few minutes later the cousins had shaken hands and parted. Robert Dennison's grasp was more affectionately tight than usual as he said good-bye; but his hand was as cold as death; his voice had not its usual sound as he expressed some commonplace hope that Gerald might still return in time for his dinner-party to-morrow.

A month later Gerald Durant looked back to this parting, and remembered bitterly the cold touch and altered voice; remembered too the set expression of Robert's face when, a minute or two afterwards, he had watched him drive away from the hotel.

A month later! What he did now was to congratulate himself heartily on being no longer bored by the possession of other people's secrets. Robert was a scheming long-headed fellow, always worrying himself with some mystification or other for social ends, which to Gerald seemed simply valueless when attained. Possibly he was married to Maggie Hall; possibly not. Whichever way it was, there were evidently tedious schemes afoot for keeping everything dark, and telling one set of people one thing and one another; and he himself had made an excellent escape by giving up his secret, and so washing his hands of all further trouble or responsibility.

"Si vous croyez que je vais dire
Qui j'ose aimer,
Je ne saurais, pour un empire,
Vous la nommer."

There was a piano in the room; and the sweet vibrat-

ing melody of Fortunio's song having suddenly come into his head, Gerald went over to the instrument, struck a chord or two, and on the spot forgot Margaret Hall and Robert Dennison, and every thing in the world belonging to them. He had an exquisitely musical voice; and when he finished the little ballad his handsome delicate features were all a-glow under the influence of that imaginary love of which he had been singing. Then he lit another cigar, threw himself upon a sofa, and read the beginning and end of a new novel; then went back to the piano, and whistled through a couple of sets of waltzes of his own composition, accompanying himself charmingly by ear, as his way was, without seeming to know what he was playing; finally remembered it was eleven o'clock, jumped up, seized his hat, and ran out just in time to meet Miss Wilson coming back from her morning's walk on the sands.

He was over head and ears in debt; was at variance with the relation to whom he owed everything and looked for everything,—on the eve, for aught he knew, of ruin of all kinds; and he had just played the strongest card he possessed into the hands of an unscrupulous adversary. And a little French song could send the tears into his eyes, and a novel amuse him, and looking into a pretty face make his pulse beat as pleasantly as if no such thing as debt or falsehood or treachery existed in the world.

Are such natures to be called wicked or weak, or only philosophical? While Rome burnt, Nero distracted his thoughts with his violin. Perhaps when his turn for rehabilitation comes we shall be taught to see how blithe and gentle and *débonnaire* poor Nero really was, and make a hero of him.

CHAPTER VII.

The Lodging in Cecil Street.

AT the window of a dingy lodging-house in one of the smaller streets leading from the Strand to the River a girl stood eagerly awaiting Robert Dennison on the day of his return from France. This girl was his wife. She was a strikingly beautiful woman, with great velvet-brown eyes, a colourless skin, but fine of texture and pure as marble; jet-black hair, a throat upright and modelled like a statue's, and lips and teeth that alone would have made any woman lovely. Her figure, moulded on a large scale and possibly promising over-stoutness for the future, was perfect at present in its full, free, youthful symmetry; and her hands—well, many a duchess has not really small and well-formed hands; and time and cessation from work, and much wearing of gloves, might yet bring poor Maggie's up to respectable mediocrity. Looking at her altogether as she was now—yes, even after she spoke; and you could detect the north-country burr upon her fresh well-pitched voice—she was a woman whose hand, with all its look of labour, a man might well take without shame and lead forward to the world as his wife. Beauty, youth, health, so perfect as in itself to be a loveliness, and as loyal a heart as ever beat within a woman's breast,—these made up Maggie's dower. And Robert Dennison put them in the balance against her one default of lowly birth, and cursed the hour in which

he committed the exceeding, the irreparable mistake of having made her his wife.

She was dressed in a clear white dress, as he liked best to see her; with plain bands of black velvet round her throat and wrists; her hair drawn straight from her broad forehead, and gathered in one large knot low on the neck; a little bunch of country-flowers, the first extravagance she had committed during her husband's absence, in her breast. Never had she looked more fair, more remote from vulgarity; never had she thrown her arms around his neck with more delighted love than when, after hours of patient watching for him, Mr. Dennison at length arrived.

"Robert! ah, Robert! I've been so lonely without you; and you've never written to me, except that one line yesterday, for a week! What have you been doing all this time away?" with the slight half-querulous tremor in her voice that when a man still loves a woman he thinks so charming, and when he has ceased to love her, so intensely boring.

"Well, I've been doing a good many things," answered Mr. Dennison, suffering her for a moment to pull his face down to her level and cover it with kisses; then breaking away and throwing himself into the only comfortable chair the room possessed,—a chair purchased expressly, in fact, for Mr. Dennison's comfort,—“spending a few days with a friend of yours, Mrs. Dennison, for one.”

“A friend of mine, Robert?” She was too excited by his coming to notice the fearfully bad omen of his calling her “Mrs. Dennison.” “La, now, who could that have been? Some one from home?”—the blood rushing up into her face at the thought.

"O yes, some one from home, in one sense; however, we'll speak of that by and by. How have you been spending your time while I was away?" He scrutinised her closely. "You have taken to a very swell style of dress in my absence, at all events."

"Swell? Me swell in my dress! Why, it's only one of my old grenadines done up and trimmed afresh. I have not had a single new dress this summer, and I'm wearing my black-velvet hat still, Sundays and all, Robert."

"What a dreadful hardship! No wonder you wanted me to return. Why don't you ask me, as you're longing to do, Maggie, whether I have brought you a new bonnet, or what I have brought you from Paris?"

Before answering, she came close to him, knelt herself on a stool at his feet, and leant her cheek fondly against his knee as she looked up in his face. Instinct told her now that her husband was in one of his bad days; and, like a dog who reads punishment in his master's eyes, she sought by caresses to turn aside the hand in whose power it lay to smite her.

"Much I think of bonnets and fine clothes when you're not here, my darling. If you had seen how I've been the last fortnight, you wouldn't have said my head was running on the like of them."

"Ah! And on 'the like' of what has your head been running, may I inquire?"

"On you, Robert, you,—and nothing else,—and wishing you back, and longing for the time when you'll not have to go away from me any more. O, my dear," she broke out passionately, and catching one of his hands tight up against her heart, "if you knew how I hated this life I have to lead! Moving fom

lodging to lodging, as if I'd done some shame I didn't want to have tracked; and never speaking to a soul from week's end to week's end, and knowing what the people at home must think of me; and all when I ought to be at your side, Robert, and known to your friends as your wife. I believe another month or two like this would drive me mad—indeed I do. I *can't* bear it.”

In the early rose-coloured time of their marriage, Dennison had hired a pretty little furnished house in St. John's Wood for poor Maggie. Then, as his love cooled, he began to remember expense, and moved her into a lodging at Kensington; then Mr. Dennison fancying, or saying he fancied, that some one had seen and recognised her at the window, into a smaller lodging; and so on—love cooling more and more—until she lived now in two rooms on the second floor of one of the meanest houses in Cecil Street, Strand.

“If you don't like London lodgings, you should do as I've often wanted you—go into the country. It can't be any particular pleasure to me, you know, to see you in such a place as this.”

Something in his tone—something in the dead feel of the hand she cherished within her own—roused all the poor girl's miserable, never-dying suspicions in a moment.

“There now!” she cried. “A minute ago I longed for your coming, more than I longed for you when you were my lover, Robert; and now I swear to God I only wish I was lying dead at your feet! It's no pleasure for you to see me here! It will never be any pleasure to you to see me anywhere; for you're tired of me; I know it all. I'm not a fine lady, with fine

feelings like yours; but I know how a man, if he was a prince, ought to treat his wife, and you don't treat me so. Why, here you've been back all 'this time' (five minutes it was really), "and you've not kissed me of your own will; you've not looked at me, hardly, yet. O Robert, Robert, love me again! I didn't mean to complain; I only want you to love me better and come and see me more."

And then she burst into tears; not silent pearly tears, just staining her cheek, as you may read of some Lady Gwendoline in her silken boudoir, but good, honest, demonstrative tears, such as these uneducated women do shed when the passions of their kind call aloud for utterance.

"O Lord!" groaned Dennison, taking his hand away from her, and putting it tight over his eyes—"scenes and tears—scenes and tears—before I have been here ten minutes, as usual!"

"You used to be so kind and good to me always when you came," she sobbed.

"And you used to be so cheerful and good-tempered," retorted Dennison; "not always crying and making these everlasting complaints as you do now. There's no good going on any longer with it all. This kind of thing has been acted out millions of times by other men and women before us, and always with the same results. Why should we be an exception? Mad passion for six weeks, cooling passion for a fortnight, general weariness on both sides, a little neglect on one, a great many reproaches on the other. There you have the story of the master-madness of most human beings' lives."

Then Maggie rose from her place at her husband's

feet, and struggled hard to keep her tears back from her eyes. "Robert," she remarked, tolerably calmly, "it seems to me that talk like this might suit very well where a man had the power to get out of 'this kind of thing;' and a girl would be a sorry fool indeed who would want to stay with him if she was free to go. But I am not free, you know; I am your wife. You seem to forget that a little, when you run on about being tired of me."

"No, by Heaven, I don't forget it!" cried Dennison, with rising passion; "I don't forget it at all; and you've taken pretty good care other people sha'n't be in a position to do so. My cousin, Mr. Gerald Durant, has told me all: how you sold me—betrayed me to my family in the first fortnight of my marriage. Not very likely that I should come here and be moved by your soft words and your deceitful kisses, when I had just been hearing such a sweet story as that."

She blenched to the colour of ashes. Her limbs seemed to tremble under her weight. "I—I never meant to do you a harm, Robert. You were ill; and I didn't know who to go to in my fright, and so I wrote to Mr. Gerald, and—"

But she stopped, sick with terror, at the new expression that she read upon her husband's face. His black eyes were fixed upon her full; the red light, that could at times illumine them, giving them a meaning such as they had never expressed to her before; his lips were set into what by courtesy may be termed a smile; and while he watched her he was keeping time gently upon the arm of the chair with the white jewelled fingers of his right hand. A sickening, a physical fear overcame her. She read she knew not what resolve

upon that iron face; and felt about as much power in herself to resist him as a dove might feel with the kite's talons already pressing upon her heart.

"It's my only offence against you," she stammered at length; "the first, and I swear to you the last."

"Of course," said Dennison, with quiet meaning; "every offence a woman like you commits is the last, until a new temptation comes. I'm quite aware of that, and also of how great a reliance can be placed upon your oath, Maggie. Still, to prevent anything so disagreeable happening again, I've been thinking over a fresh plan with regard to your future life. Before I married you, I remember you saying you had a fancy to go to America——"

"Robert!"

"Hear me out, please; and do try not to get up any more scenes." But he shifted away from the gaze of the large horror-struck eyes that were staring miserably at him from that white face. "I am not going to poison you, or shut you up in a madhouse; so you needn't go in for any of the tears and shrieks of your favourite penny-Herald heroines. What I am going to propose will be for your happiness and mine. I know of some excellent people just going out to Canada, and willing to take you with them, for a couple of years or so. You would lead a cheerful country life, instead of being moped up here in London lodgings; you should hear from me constantly; you should never have a hand's turn of work to do unless you chose it; and——"

"I will not go."

"Ah! I *wish* you would have the civility to hear me patiently till I have finished."

"I will not go. Why should I stand here and listen to more of your insults?"

He shrugged his shoulders quietly.

"When you take to that sort of language you, of course, have the advantage of me, Maggie. Still, it would be better, for your own sake, perhaps, if you would keep yourself a little more composed."

"I'm quite composed enough to know what you want, and what I mean to do."

"And that is—? I should really like to hear what your views for the future are."

"Well, they vary, Robert, they vary. Sometimes, when the blackest times are on me, you know, I think I'll just walk away to the river and throw myself in, and be at rest."

"Indeed! That resolution, I am quite sure, passes away very quickly. *Après?* I beg your pardon—what next?"

"Well, next, when I think how it would please you to be rid of me, and how then you would be able to work free, as you'd like to, at getting Mr. Gerald out of his uncle's favour" (for a moment Mr. Dennison's fingers did not keep perfect time to that imaginary air he was playing), "then, I say, I think of quite a different way to act. You want to hear?"

He nodded assent, the red glow becoming more visible in his eyes.

"Then I think I'll just go straight down to the Court, and take my marriage-lines out and show them, and ask them to be my friends. The ladies would, I'll answer for it; for they are too real ladies to feel that I shamed them, as common rich people would. And so would Sir John, in time. He doesn't love you

enough to take your marriage to heart as he might have done if it had been Mr. Gerald."

If Maggie had known the world for fifty, instead of for one-and-twenty years, she could not have struck home with surer aim to the hard worldly heart of Robert Dennison than her simple peasant instincts had enabled her to do. Every word told. Her knowledge of his designs, scarcely whispered to his own conscience, against Gerald; the term "common rich people" (Dennison's father had been a manufacturer); last, and sharpest, the bitter truth that Sir John would, with very little pain, get over *his* mésalliance—all stung him more acutely than any reproaches, however unjust, however passionate, of his wife's had ever done before.

"You had better have a care before you speak to me like this," he exclaimed under his breath, as he always spoke when he was really moved. "For your coarse suspicions of myself I don't care, except in as far as they remind me of my degradation in being married to a woman who could even admit them to her mind. For the rest, Maggie, take my advice; don't you go to Durant's Court without me."

"I may do that, and worse, if you say anything about sending me off to America again," she answered sullenly, but with a piteous quiver of the lips.

"May I inquire what you mean by 'and worse?' It would be a pity for us in the least to misunderstand each other."

"I mean that I may just walk straight to your chambers any day, and demand to stay there;—you hear, Robert,—*demand* to stay there. I mean that I may go to a lawyer, and tell him all my case, and see

whether I haven't a right to live under your roof. Now you know all."

He watched her slowly and calmly while she said this; then he remarked, without any further sign of passion in his voice, "Yes; now I know all. I felt long ago that I had been an idiot for marrying a peasant woman with a handsome face like yours; but I credited you—on my soul I did, Maggie!—with loving me at least. Now I see you as you are,—the worst kind of woman, I believe, that lives. You acted virtue to make me marry you; you acted love as long as you thought love would pay. Now that you find yourself in poor lodgings, and with bonnets running short, you come out in your true colours; threaten me to go to law sooner than be robbed of a shilling that you think your own. As you rightly remark, now I know all."

She was an ignorant peasant woman; he was quite correct there. But in her peasant heart were truth and justice, and in her peasant brain was sharp, honest common-sense. And his injustice was too transparent to wound her.

"You say all that, but you don't mean it, Robert. My virtue, as you call it, was not play-acting—as I'm your wife, I wonder you like to think so;—and my love wasn't; and it is not money I want now. I want justice, and I'll have it."

"O, you will?"

"Yes, I will! if not from you, from others. I swear that."

"Very well. Now listen to me, and to something else I'm going to swear." He got up and stood close to her, looking steadily down into her face. "I am

not a weak man, as you know; not at all likely to be turned from anything I once make up my mind to do; and now I will tell you how I'm going to act about you. This proposal of going abroad you may or may not accept—"

"I will not accept it."

"Very well; then you will live elsewhere. That is a matter about which I can merely offer an opinion. You can, if you choose, stay here in London, or you can go into the country; and as long as you remain quiet, and act as I tell you to act, I shall come and see you constantly, and try to make your life as little lonely as I can."

The blood rushed to her foolish heart at the first approach to a kind word from his lips. Poor fellow! had she not been too hard upon him a minute ago?

"I'm no blackguard, Maggie; and in spite of your temper and reproaches, I do remember—remember, is it ever away from my mind?—that you are my wife. In a few years, possibly much sooner, I hope to have got on in my profession; very likely, through my uncle's interest, to be in Parliament—you see I tell you everything openly and above-board—and then, having educated yourself in the interval, my poor Maggie, we will acknowledge our marriage before the world. This, mind, is the future *I* look forward to, if you continue to obey me. Now for the other side. If you, directly, or indirectly, make known our marriage to my uncle, I swear to you this: from that moment you will be my wife no longer, save in name. You may be acknowledged by my family; you may by law obtain the right of living under my roof—to-morrow, I've no doubt, if you set about it properly—

and if you do, I swear—do you hear?—I swear that I will never take your hand in mine, never look upon you, except as a stranger, again while I live. Now we understand each other thoroughly, I think, and the happiness or the misery of our lives is in your hands.” And Mr. Dennison took up his hat as if to go.

For a minute she stood irresolute; then she turned, faltered to him, and fell upon his breast.

“I’ll say nothing; I’ll never go near the Court, or near any of them; I’ll never wish to disobey you again, Robert. If I see Mr. Gerald, and you tell me to, I’ll say that it was a falsehood I wrote about my marriage. Only never look at me as you did then. Never think the thought even of giving me up. O Robert, I’d bear any shame with you sooner than to be called your wife before men, and that you should look at me again as you did then!”

He had hit upon the right way of managing her at last. Robert Dennison felt that, and prided himself on his skill in diagnosis, as he sat, with limbs outstretched, comfortably smoking in a coupé of the express train some hours later, on his road to Staffordshire. The question was now, how to utilise his slave’s new subjugation to the uttermost? Was it quite impossible that, instead of hindering, she might be brought to lend herself to the furtherance of his ambition? One thing was certain; the letters she had written Gerald Durant lay in his, Robert Dennison’s, desk. With his wife working for, not against him, what was to prove the marriage, even if Gerald, not a likely occurrence, should betray him to his uncle?

It was a soft summer evening, the first evening in

August; and as the train bore Robert Dennison through the rich harvest-tinted fields, he was sensible of great enjoyment in the delicious country air, the golden landscape, the excellent flavour of his first-rate havannah. No man of his stamp seems bad to himself while his plans look prosperous. Remorse, or what stands to such men for remorse, sets in with the first dark days of threatening discovery; and no discovery at all seemed impending now. Maggie had been suddenly brought, by a little kind harshness, to a proper state of mind. Gerald Durant, in a fit of Quixotic generosity, had made over the game, for the present at least, into his own hands. What was there in either of these circumstances to disturb Mr. Robert Dennison's conscience?

He enjoyed the fair evening landscape, the country air, the motion even of the train, with a keener relish than he had enjoyed anything for months; and his dark face looked handsomer than usual, so genial and well-pleased was the expression it wore, when, just in time to obey the first dressing-bell, he arrived at Durant's Court.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Noblesse oblige."

"WELL, and what of Gerald?" asked Sir John Durant, when at length a somewhat silent dinner was finished, and Lady Durant and Lucia had left the uncle and nephew alone over their wine. "You found him out and gave him my message, as I desired, Robert?"

"Yes, sir. I gave him your message," answered Dennison. "Indeed, I returned from Paris by Morte-ville instead of Havre, to do so."

"Morteville! Is Gerald there?"

"He has been there for the last week or more, I believe."

"Doing what, pray?"

"Well, sir—" and Mr. Dennison had the grace to hesitate.

"Robert," cried the old man, "I desire that you will speak the honest truth to me. The time has past for you, or for any of us, to show any consideration in speaking of Gerald's actions. For Lucia's sake alone, I have a right to put these questions, and to require very plain speaking from you in reply."

"Oh, don't think there's anything wrong going on," said Robert, looking up with sudden animation. "Poor Gerald merely seems to be killing his time as usual. He has been travelling for a month in the Tyrol, I believe, and is now—well, if I must speak

plainly, is now losing a good deal of money to some table d'hôte acquaintance at écarté, every evening, and running about during the day-time after the last pretty face that has taken his fancy. Nothing more than that, sir, on my word."

"Oh! And what answer did he give to my message?" It never wanted more than one word of Robert Dennison's dispraise to make the old man secretly warm towards the absent prodigal. "You gave it him exactly in my words, I hope?"

"I did. I had your letter in my hand when I spoke to him."

"Well?"

"Well, sir. I really don't think there are any grounds whatever for supposing Gerald is guilty of what you have suspected him—on my word, I do not. No man could look as happy, as he does, who was entangled in the miserable way you have feared."

"Happy—looks happy, does he? That shows, at least, how much he cares for his alienation from Lucia! Robert, give me his answer, if you please. I want the precise message that Gerald returns to mine."

"He told me that he is innocent, sir," said Dennison, shifting his eyes from his uncle's face as he spoke. "That he knows nothing of Maggie Hall, that he never saw her from the day of her disappearance till this."

"And you believe this, on your honour, to be true, Robert?"

"I do. I see no proof whatever against Gerald, more than against any other man." Mr. Dennison helped himself to a bunch of grapes, carefully selecting

the muscatel, of which he was particularly fond, from the black Hamburg. "I see no positive proof against Gerald, and I don't know why we should disbelieve his word."

"And why has he taken no pains to come forward to prove this to me? You are a lawyer, Robert. Is it not commonly thought in law that, if a man makes no attempt to prove his innocence, it is tolerably strong presumptive evidence of his guilt?"

"Certainly," answered Dennison; "and there could be very little doubt as to the justice of the presumption, with regard to any ordinary man. But Gerald, in some things, is not at all an ordinary man. He is indolent by temperament, and is thoroughly and consistently a fatalist. If he is to be cleared, it is without any exertion or trouble of his own; if he is not——"

"If he is not, and soon, too, he will be a beggar!" cried Sir John Durant, angrily. "If Gerald, with a suspicion like this hanging over him, chooses to philter away his time with worthless men and women at Morteville, as all his life before has been spent, he may do so; but when he wearies of them he shall not find Lucia's hand ready for his reward! Of that I have quite made up my mind. That he has married this wretched girl I do not, in my heart, believe. No, Robert, I do not. With all his faults, Gerald is not a boy to bring such shame as that upon us. Whether he had any share in her flight, I decline even to think. What I have to do with is this, that he has been accused—he, my daughter's promised husband—of having made a shameful marriage, and that he has allowed near upon seven months to pass without coming here openly, and telling me all. Yes, all, Robert.

Gerald knows what I have been to him, what I could forgive at this moment—ay, till seventy times seven—if he would come honestly forward and acquit himself of so foul a charge.”

“And—and if he could not thus acquit himself?” asked Dennison, in a somewhat compressed voice. “As regards Lucia, I need not ask what your feelings must be towards him; but would this marriage, supposing the worst to be true, be sufficient to make you cast the poor fellow off entirely? A lowly alliance is not necessarily a shameful one, sir.”

“Indeed. I am sorry to hear such an opinion from you, although I am willing to believe you actuated by good feeling towards Gerald in expressing it. If a nephew of mine, Robert, was to marry Margaret Hall, or any woman in her class, I would from that day banish him from my heart, my house, and, which I dare say he would care much more for, from my will too. No one is more lenient to folly—ay, even to error, in a young man than myself. Dishonour I would never either forget or condone. Our family has not hitherto had blood like Margaret Hall’s in its veins.”

“The worse for our family,” thought Robert, mentally comparing Lucia’s sickly prettiness and the magnificent face and form he had parted from four or five hours ago; then aloud: “I suppose you are right, sir,” he said. “I suppose a *mésalliance* is about the worst action, for himself and for others, that a man can commit. However,” he went on, “I am glad to find that, like myself, you don’t believe Gerald to be so deeply committed. Give him the benefit of the doubt still. Pride, delicacy, a hundred feelings we may not understand” (how unconsciously men utter epigrams about

themselves!) "may prevent him from coming forward to prove anything in such a matter. We don't even know what his relations may really have been with Maggie Hall."

But Robert Dennison had humanity enough in him to feel that these words, this implied calumny against this man and woman who were truest to him in the world, rather choked him in the utterance.

"Robert," answered Sir John, after a minute or two of silence, "I'm in no humour now to talk about Gerald's pride, and Gerald's delicacy. How low has not my pride been sunk during all these months? You are the nearest relation after Gerald that I have. I don't know why, save that he grew up here, I should say 'after' him at all. You are as near to me as he is, and I'm now going to tell you the simple truth about all this. It has been my dream, you know, for that boy to marry Lucia. He must have the title, he must have the old house when I am gone, and it has been the hope of my life that Lucia should share them with him, and that her children should be born here, as my son's children would have been had he lived. Well, I begin to see that my dream has been a foolish one. Not for this one misunderstanding—a misunderstanding that another month, another week, may heal. For this last misunderstanding itself, no; but because this indifference of Gerald shows me in reality what the character of the man is whom I look upon as a son. 'Tis no use glozing it over, Robert. For more than six months now Gerald has known himself to rest under this imputation, yet never has he come forward in an open, manly way either to refute or acknowledge the charge. Married to her, I do not believe he is, but every man and woman

in the county believes Gerald Durant, in some way, to have been cognizant of Margaret Hall's flight. And still Gerald Durant is the promised husband of my daughter. It shan't go on any more so; my God, it shan't!" he repeated, passionately. "I wrote him one letter, and he sent me,—well, he sent me what I felt to be a cursed flippant answer, affecting to treat the whole thing as a joke, and even saying—mark this, Robert, even saying that if a member of the family *had* married Maggie, he thought it a disgrace that could be very easily got over. To have sacrificed worldly prospects for the woman one loves would be honour—hear that! rather than disgrace, with more high-flown rubbish about the girl's goodness and beauty and virtue than I care to think of;" and the old man's face flushed over with passion. "Now, in reply to this last message sent through you, he coolly sends me word that he is innocent. Innocent! when he ought to be here at Lucia's side, here sitting at my table proving his innocence! And you tell me he is losing his money—my money would be nearer the mark—and running after disreputable acquaintances at Morteville. I'll have done with the lad—I'll have done with him!" he exclaimed, now fairly worked up to white heat. "Thank God, he is not my only nephew, Robert. I have you to look to yet to keep our family from utter disgrace and ruin. My poor little Lucia."

In all his life Robert Dennison had never seen Sir John Durant so moved. He was a well-preserved, handsome old man, with grey eyes that once had been soft and passionate, like Gerald's; a fair receding forehead, but beautiful rather than intellectual in its contour; refined patrician features; and with only the fatal

hereditary weakness of mouth and chin to mar the face. A hot flush had risen over his cheek; his lips trembled as he spoke. Now, if ever, Robert felt was the time for him to strike; now, with the metal hot, Gerald away, and his own superior virtue and ability in such conspicuous pre-eminence.

"As regards Margaret Hall, I can only repeat I believe Gerald to be innocent. As regards his behaviour to Lucia, I can't trust myself to speak. That is a subject on which Gerald and I have not agreed for a good many years. But there is another point on which I may, without disingenuousness to my cousin, speak openly. I should do so if Gerald were sitting here at table with us. It does grieve me bitterly to see him so utterly indifferent to the public career which, through your interest, sir, he might enter upon, if he chose."

The tone in which he said this was unmistakeably sincere; much more so than the tone in which he had been speaking hitherto. Sir John Durant looked steadfastly at his strong, resolute brow and face, and the thought crossed him that he had hitherto done this other nephew of his injustice. The son of an unloved sister, and of a man whom he secretly despised for his want of birth, Robert Dennison had never awakened any but the most lukewarm interest in his heart. Every hope, every ambition, the promise of every good thing, had been lavished on Gerald; and now Gerald was a spendthrift and a prodigal, and this other lad was prudent, self-denying, steady; a poor, albeit a rising barrister, living in his frugal Temple chambers, and trusting only to his own industry and his own brain for success.

"It needs but for you to bring him forward," repeated Dennison, after a minute or two, during which

he had felt rather than seen his uncle's steadfast scrutiny of his face; "it needs but for you to bring him forward, and Gerald must be returned for L——. I was speaking to Conyers about it only to-day, and he said the contest would be a nominal one. You and Lord Sandford together can bring in any man you choose to propose; and if Gerald . . . But what is the use of talking about it?" he interrupted himself, with unassumed bitterness. "Gerald has no more ambition now than he had when he was eleven, and retired—do you remember, sir?—from competing for a prize he was certain of, because he wished some other boy—his Damon of the minute!—to get it. He never had ambition; he never will have it. Ambition! It is not in his nature to desire anything strongly."

Sir John winced under the remark, then lapsed into silence—the little reminiscence of Gerald's childish folly not, perhaps, affecting his weaker nature quite in the way that it affected Mr. Dennison—and, after a few minutes, rose from his chair, and proposed that they should join the ladies in the drawing-room.

"But you are not angry, sir?" cried Dennison, anxiously, as he jumped up, with the deferential promptness he always showed in obeying his uncle's smallest wishes. "You are not annoyed, I hope, at my having alluded to all this?" he repeated in a low tone, as they were on their way to the drawing-room. "You know it's an old ambition of mine to see our family represented in Parliament, and I can't help feeling strongly about it at such a time as this."

"Annoyed with you! No, no," answered Sir John; but he turned from his admirable, high-principled nephew as he spoke, and, looking through the open door

of his daughter's morning-room, his eyes fell on a beautiful full-length portrait of the prodigal; the prodigal at nine years of age, with little Lucia by his side. "I was only wishing he was somewhat more like you, Robert," added the old man with a sigh. "With your ambition and your standing, Gerald might have become anything he chose."

"Say rather, with Gerald's personal qualities I might have become anything I chose, sir," Dennison answered quickly. "Ambition and perseverance are very well, but brilliant natural gifts—a face and a manner like Gerald's are worth all of them in the race of life. For one man or one woman who likes me, fifty like him. It has been so always, and it is just. I have only to be with him an hour myself to feel the fascination of his presence as much as anyone."

The real strength of Robert Dennison's character lay in his capacity for saying things like this. A common, coarse slanderer slanders indiscriminately. Dennison knew not only where to stop from reviling, but where to begin to be generous. And then he possessed the rare gift of seeming to feel what he said! At this moment his voice shook, his face softened, and Sir John Durant felt that he had never cared for his sister's son so much in his life before. "You're a good lad, Robert, and a generous one, and some day I'll prove to the world the high opinion I have of you!" And as he entered the drawing-room, one of his hands rested kindly on his nephew's shoulder.

With a quick, upraised glance from her embroidery, Lucia Durant noticed the unwonted familiarity, and knew that Gerald must be further off than ever from her father's heart.

CHAPTER IX.

Lucia.

THE drawing-room at Durant's Court was a long low room, with mullioned windows, glazed still in the ancient style, with small diamond-formed quarries, a heavily-carved ceiling, panelled walls, and tapestry-covered furniture that had served the Durants during the last hundred years at least. Surrounded in the county by pottery lords far richer than themselves, pottery lords who converted their houses into amateur bazaars or show-rooms of everything costly and elaborate in modern upholstery, it was Lady Durant's vanity to keep the Court furnished simply as it was when she first came to it a bride, and when none of their rich neighbours had as yet risen above their native clay. No ornament in the hall save its dark groined roof, the shields of arms upon its walls, and one huge suit of tilting-armour—not bought in Wardour Street, but that had been worn by a Durant of old, and had descended from father to son in the family since the time of Elizabeth. In the dining-room plain mahogany furniture, of a fashion to recall the parlour in which Squire Western used to sit and listen to his Sophia's harpsichord. In the bedchambers the faded blue or green or damask hangings, which had given to each its name for generations; and in the drawing-room, as I have said, the same tapestry-covered chairs and couches as had been the mode when George the Third first became king.

"No better furnished than a parsonage," the manufacturers' ladies thought, when by rare chance any of them came to be admitted on a morning visit to Lady Durant. But then what a strange, what a potent atmosphere of home seemed, by virtue of its very plainness, to hang over all the silent, grave old house! The manufacturers' wives were sensible of *that*, and for the life of them could not make out why the crimson-and-gold stained windows, the cast-iron balustrades, the velvets and silks and ormolu, of their own Italian stucco palaces would always keep their show-room gloss, and steadfastly refuse to be invested with the look of home. The look which only a house wherein men have been born, and have loved and died, can ever wear. The one unpurchaseable quality that makes these quiet, unchanged old country houses dear, as are the faces of tried friends, to those who inherit and live in them.

The angle of Durant's Court faced south and west. At every season of the year sun and light were in all its rooms. Close without, two giant cedars sent up their immemorial fragrance from the smooth-shorn lawn. All through the summer, roses and honeysuckles clustered at every open bedroom window. In winter, the old-fashioned smell of dried rose-leaves and lavender made you think of summer still. The house lay somewhat low, and on no side commanded a view beyond its own densely-wooded grounds. It was shut out from all sounds save those of its own small world; the very cawing of the crows was exclusive—the Court Rookery! All the changes, all the noise of the outer world touched it not. Year by year the same quiet servants went about the same routine of quiet duties, the same furniture stood in the rooms, the same smell of the

roses mingled with the cedars in June, the same old portraits were lit up by the blazing wood-fires at Christmas. Nothing altered, nothing progressed there, save, within the last twenty years, one young girl's life. And even this had been so gentle a growth as scarce to bring about any vital change in the habits or customs of the house. At twenty, Lucia was a grown-up young woman, of course; but save that she no longer had a governess, and that she wore long dresses instead of short ones, and sat up as late as her papa and mamma at night, her life, and the lives of all about her, went on very much the same as they had done when she was ten.

It was an old joke of Gerald's, when he was a small boy, to say the Court was an enchanted palace sleeping for a hundred years, and that he would be the fairy prince bringing "love and pleasure, hope and pain," when he married Lucia. And little Lucia, with her doll in her arms, had laughed at the joke then. Latterly, the mention of their marriage had become much too solemn a thing to be spoken of in jest; nay, even to be openly spoken of at all. Lady Durant willed it so. It was very well when they were children; but no grown-up girl should listen to any talk of love or marriage until such time as the trousseau must be got ready. And Lucia, quite calm on the subject, had answered, "All right, mamma, not till the trousseau must be got ready;" while Gerald—well, Gerald, if truth is spoken, had acquiesced only too gladly in any abrogation of the duties of his courtship.

As part and parcel of the dear old place, he liked Lucia. Liked her as he liked the house, the cedars, the good old wines, the slow old carriage-horses, and

everything else enclosed within the boundaries of the Court. Love he never had felt, never could feel, towards her: no, nor the feeling which, in the world he frequented, amongst the men he associated with, is dignified by the name of love. Women of many grades and many nations had inspired his quickly-fired imagination long before he first saw Archie Lovell: Lucia never—Lucia, poor little Lucia—could awaken in him neither sentiment nor passion. She held something the place a man's favourite sister holds in his regard: scarcely that. A sister, to be a favourite one, must make herself your companion; and this, up to the present time, Lucia had never done; Lady Durant not holding favourable opinions of allowing a young girl to be the companion of any one save of her governess or her mother.

No woman of forty is thoroughly suited to begin, for the first time, to bring up a child's life. Lady Durant was more than forty when Lucia was born; her husband was fifteen years older than herself; and so the girl had grown up unnaturally staid and good, as the only child of elderly parents is almost sure to be. Lady Durant loved her devotedly—more devotedly, perhaps, than some younger women love their daughters—but living so long in this shut-out existence, without children, save him whose few weeks of life had made her own so much more lonely, without companionship except her husband's, she had forgotten, too completely, the feelings of youth to become, in any wise, the companion of her child. When she was a girl, she had been brought up according to the doctrine of Mrs. Hannah More, and according to these doctrines, very little modified, she brought up her daughter. The

genuine British idea of gravity being a virtue, *per se*, was rooted deep in Lady Durant's heart. As a baby, Lucia had been duly impressed with the notion that she must never laugh out of season, must repeat solemn words solemnly, *et cetera*; and as her high-pressure governesses made solemn teachings the main part of her education, the poor child, as time wore on, not only repeated solemn words, but all words in an unnaturally subdued tone, and with an unnaturally lengthy face. There was nothing stern, nothing unwomanly in Lady Durant's character. She simply held that prosaic, rigid, coldly-methodical theory of human life, in which a recognition of our capacity either for keen pleasure, or of the sense of the ludicrous, has no place. The mother of sons, her character might have become tenderer, more catholic—for girls she held mediocrity to be the beau-ideal of perfection; and her daughter had certainly grown up the very incarnation of the prim, rigid, unimaginative system in which she had been reared.

Her face, as her photograph had told Archie Lovell, was singularly correct, as far as mere feature went. Colour, life, vigour, were all that was wanting to make her beautiful. Of these she was bereft. The development of children, after all, depends as much upon physical as upon moral causes. If the Court had stood upon a breezy upland, the old parents and the want of companions, and the excellent training of Lady Durant even, would not have sufficed to quench the buoyancy out of Lucia's childhood. But the Court lay low—sheltered from every wind of heaven—hemmed in by those glorious old trees, so favourable to the haunted peace of aristocracy, so antagonistic to the circulation of oxygen, which aristocratic and plebeian lungs appear

to stand in need of alike! And so, after many years' indecision whether she would grow up at all, Miss Durant, of Durant, grew up a weed, much after the pattern of the pale, scentless flowers that grew under the shadow of the cedars on the lawn. You could look at her now and feel logically certain as to what she could be at thirty, or forty, or sixty. A man marrying her might feel assured that he took to himself as spotless a heart as any English household could produce; for the very ignorance of childhood was on Lucia still. But he must feel, also, that he could prophecy with accuracy concerning all the future years of his domestic life, and this to some men—to a man like Gerald especially—is a singularly depressing thought. Men of his temperament crave for amusement more, perhaps, than for any other possession. Lucia never could amuse any one. None of the little aberrations from the beaten track, which make a young, untutored girl so charming, were possible to her. Nothing that she said, nothing that she did, was ever unexpected. On mild platitudes she had been reared up; uttering and enacting mild platitudes she would live and rear up her children after her.

"Honest, fair, womanly," Gerald had often thought, when he watched his cousin's face, and looked onward to the life he would have to spend with her; fair, gentle, feminine, everything he admired most in women, and a bore. And about the strongest aversion of Mr. Durant's easy, epicurean nature was summed up in that one word.

Robert Dennison had mentally compared Miss Durant with his wife, awhile since, when Sir John spoke of no blood like Margaret Hall's running in the Durant

veins. The comparison returned to him with double force when he came into the drawing-room and saw Lucia sitting there: her delicate face bent down beside the lamp, her wax-like hands buried in her embroidery, the whole, still figure in its dead-white dress looking very much like one of Mr. Sandys' beautiful rose-and-alabaster heroines (just ready to have "snowdrop," or "pearl," or "lily," emblazoned in gold letters, at her feet). And Mr. Dennison, whose taste inclined towards robust, Juno-like beauty, rather than towards ethereal heroines, felt in his heart that his low-born wife was handsomer, yes, and nobler-looking too, than Miss Durant, of Durant, with all her pale refinement—all her studied grace!

She turned her head at his entrance, smiling the pretty smile that she had been taught from her babyhood to accord to people, whether she liked them or not, and Robert came and seated himself by her side.

"Busy, as usual, Lucia. What elaborate piece of work are you employed upon now?"

"Nothing very elaborate, Robert; only a crest and initials. Do you like them?" and she put her work into his hands.

"G. S. D." and the Durant crest. Then, all this elaboration of delicate stitching, these fine interpolations of lilliputian lace-work, were for Gerald; and it was being worked under Lady Durant's own eyes. Robert Dennison returned the handkerchief to his cousin in a second.

"I admire your skill, Lucia, but I do not admire embroidery and lace-work for men. I always think a man who wears embroidery on his handkerchief, ought to wear long, scented love-locks, and lace-ruffles at his

wrists and throat, like one of the courtiers of Charles the Second."

"Why?"

"To be thoroughly in keeping, Lucia."

"But long hair and lace-ruffles are not the fashion now, and embroidered crests on handkerchiefs are."

"The fashion! A man need not follow fashion, like a girl, you know."

"Why not?"

"Because his aim is not to please by his pretty face and hands as hers is, and ought to be."

"Not by his pretty face, of course—pretty is never said of gentlemen—but by being handsome and well dressed. If I was a boy I would have well-made clothes, and good gloves and embroidered handkerchiefs as Gerald does."

"And sit before the glass studying the fashion-books and the set of your ties, and whether lavender gloves or straw-colour became you most, I hope, Lucia?" said Robert, with a laugh.

"Oh, dear no, not if I was really a boy," answered Miss Durant, looking up into his face. "If I was really a boy, I suppose I should ride to hounds, and row, and play cricket, and be brave like Gerald is."

Of all persons in the world Robert Dennison found his cousin Lucia the most difficult to get on with. To a man whose forte lies in half statements, implied detraction, delicate innuendo, no human creature is so embarrassing as one of these matter-of-fact people who say "why?" to everything, and receive every statement made to them in its formal and literal meaning. If he had said, "Gerald is an empty-headed fop, Gerald spends his time before the glass trying on neck-ties

and deliberating as to the colour of kid gloves," Lucia, after some consideration, might have admitted the new idea to her mind. His covert allusions to cavaliers and lace-ruffles and fashion-books, reached her apprehension very much as they would have reached the apprehension of a child of six. And this uncompromising simplicity, this invincible slowness of comprehension, really served Lucia as largeness of heart serves wiser people. Want of imagination kept her true; want of imagination made her just; up to the mark of a child's truth and of a child's justice.

"You should not be spoiling your eyes by lamp-light, Lucia, with such a moon as that telling you to go out in the fresh air," Mr. Dennison remarked, after watching her quiet face for a minute or two. "Would it hurt you, do you think, to have a walk in the garden? A night like this is rather a treat, you know, to a poor smoke-dried Londoner like me." Robert Dennison had reasons for wishing to talk to Lucia confidentially; and as he was to leave the Court before any of them would be up next morning, he knew that this would be his only opportunity of seeing her alone.

"Mamma, Robert wishes me to go out with him—may I?"

"What, at nine o'clock? Well, Lucia never does go out so late, Robert, on account of her throat; but if there is no dew, and you keep on the gravel——"

Dennison ran out through the window, and resting his hand down on the turf declared it to be as dry as the carpet; and then Miss Durant, with a shawl pinned round her head as though she had been a very rheumatic old woman, was allowed to go out for ten minutes, with strict injunctions to walk fast all the time, and

Dennison, resolving to make the most of his time, drew her hand within his arm and marched her far away at once from out of hearing of the old people.

"Robert has improved," remarked Sir John, when the sound of their footsteps had died away; "very much improved. Don't you think so, Jane?"

"Robert Dennison looks in good health," answered Lady Durant's measured voice; "but that I think he always did. What does he say of Gerald?"

"I don't mean improved in health," said Sir John, pettishly; "I mean improved in manners, in bearing, in every way. Robert is a young man who will make his way yet in the world, Lady Durant. You will see that."

"I always thought he would make his way, Sir John, in his own walk of life. His father was a person, I believe, who made his way in the world—was he not?"

"His father! Where is the good of talking in that way now, Lady Durant? You know very well I disliked this lad's father, and I don't think it's generous—no, by God! I don't think it's generous in you, Jane, to bring up the poor fellow's want of birth so constantly!"

"My dear Sir John—"

"Oh, it's all very fine, and of course you said nothing really against him; but I know your tone, and I know how you have felt all your life about Robert. It would be well for us both, Jane, if we had thought more of him, and a little less of that scapegrace, Gerald; well for ourselves, and the honour of our family too."

When Sir John Durant took up an obstinate fit,

you might as well have sought to move him by arguments as to transplant one of his own cedars by a touch of your hand. He had worked himself into real anger towards Gerald this evening; and Lady Durant saw that very little was needed to push him into real amity towards Dennison.

"I don't know why you should say we have undervalued Robert," she remarked, very quietly. "I, for one, have ever been alive to his good, steady, hard-working qualities."

"And have made him your favourite? taken him to your heart as a son? promised him your daughter's hand? You have done all this for Robert Dennison, have you not, Jane?"

"No, Sir John, I have not," answered Lady Durant, firmly; "neither have you. Robert never has been, never can be, as near my heart as Gerald is. Gerald took the place to me of my own son, and whether he marries Lucia or not, he will hold it." And Lady Durant rose, and coming up close beside her husband's arm-chair, rested her hand down on his shoulder.

She was a handsome woman, looking ten years younger than her age; tall, upright, with the same pure cut features as Lucia, soft grey hair, braided low upon her forehead, and teeth and hands that still were beautiful. With all her sectarian, narrow-minded foibles there was a certain old-fashioned honesty, a certain womanly refined grace about Lady Durant (rare, perhaps, to meet among some of the more liberal-minded London matrons of the present day), that invested her with a charm still in the eyes of the husband of her youth. The calm stagnant atmosphere that had failed to develop the young girl's nature seemed to have pre-

served that of the mature woman in more than ordinary freshness: and as Sir John Durant looked up into his wife's face now, something about its unwonted emotion, the unwonted sight of tears within her eyes, touched him strongly—these good simple country people, who in their old age could still be moved by the expression of each other's faces! "I don't ask you to love Robert Dennison, Jane. I know, keenly enough, how dear Gerald still is to us both. All I want is, that we should be just."

"In what way just, Sir John?"

"In not lavishing every good thing upon one lad to the exclusion of the other. We have given this house to be Gerald's home, we have promised to receive him as a son. That is enough. Enough, God knows! when we consider the gratitude he shows us in return."

"And what is this that you propose to do for Robert, then? Tell me. I would rather you told me. I will oppose you in nothing that you decide to be wise and just, even if all our happiness—Lucia's most—has to be sacrificed to what *you* feel to be duty!"

Wise words—words which showed that, whatever Lady Durant's errors might be regarding the training of daughters, she thoroughly understood those smaller tactics of domination which make a clever woman a good wife. In five minutes she was mistress of all the vague projects respecting Robert's advancement that had as yet vacillated across her husband's mind; and in a quarter of an hour Sir John Durant had had his biscuit and half-tumbler of weak brandy-and-water, and was walking up to his bed, not over sorry to take his

wife's advice and defer further conversation with "poor Robert" until his next visit to the Court—until Gerald, at least, had returned to England, and had been allowed one more chance of vindicating himself.

"But tell Robert from me that I shall not forget our conversation, Jane." The old man said this as his wife stood and dutifully looked after him from the drawing-room door. "And say that I hope to see him again before long—he may bring Conyers down with him, if he can—and then we'll talk matters over more seriously. And just tell him, too, I have never stayed up later than nine since my last attack. It looks unkind to the lad to go away without wishing him good-bye."

All of which Lady Durant very readily promised to do, and did, only with a shade less of cordiality in her manner than Robert Dennison could have desired.

Gain ascendancy over his uncle he might, of that he felt assured; over Lady Durant possibly, in time and with unflagging tact and perseverance; over Lucia never. With her hand resting on his arm, the moonlight shining on her face through the dark cloister of the overshadowing trees, here, in the old garden, where he had played with her any time ever since she could walk alone, Robert Dennison felt more embarrassed by this simple girl than he had ever felt by brow-beating judge or bullying brother barrister in his life.

"You—you don't inquire after Gerald," he remarked, when they had walked to the farthest terrace in the garden—Lucia's terrace, as it was called—and when several common-place remarks had met with nothing but the girl's accustomed quiet "yes" or "no."

"But perhaps you don't know that I have seen him?"—pressing the hand, ever so gently and compassionately, that rested on his arm.

"Yes, I know it. I heard from Gerald this morning."

"Oh! I did not know. Lucia, dear child, I must be candid, I did not know that you and Gerald still kept up any correspondence."

Lucia was silent.

"In the present state of things between Sir John and Gerald, I must say, Lucia, that this surprises me."

"Did papa tell you to say this, Robert? Don't say it, please, unless he did." She dropped her hold of his arm, and looked up full at him as she spoke.

"Your father did not tell me to speak to you, Lucia. It is my own interest in you and in Gerald that makes me do so; however, I will say nothing unless you wish to hear it."

"I don't wish to hear anything against Gerald, Robert; that's all. I don't like you to tell tales of him now, any more than I used, years ago, when you were boys."

"And when you were—what, Lucia?—a wise little old lady of ten or eleven, but just the same, as Gerald says, just the same dear little model of good sense and propriety that you are now at twenty-one."

If he thought to pique her into anger, he was wholly unsuccessful. Gerald's opinion of her seemed to Lady Durant's daughter rather a compliment than otherwise.

"But I shall not be twenty-one till December the 16th. Gerald's birthday is in the same month, you know, ten days later."

"Ah, yes, and he will be twenty-six. That is the time at which the marriage was to have taken place, if it had taken place at all, was it not?"

"Of course, Robert. Why do you ask?"

"I wanted to see if one of you, at least, bore any remembrance of the old engagement in mind."

"Do you mean to tell me that Gerald does not?"

Dennison was silent.

"Do you mean to say that Gerald pretends to forget the old engagement, as you call it?"

But now Miss Durant's voice did tremble a little. Pride was the strongest feeling by far that she possessed; and Robert Dennison had at last succeeded in awakening it.

"I mean this, Lucia," he answered, in a soothing voice, "that Gerald's whole way of living shows him not to be a marrying man. Would any one, any man of common sense, who intended to be married in six months' time, rest quietly under such an imputation as lies on poor Gerald now?"

"I don't believe the imputation. I don't believe a word about Gerald and Maggie Hall."

"And your trust in him does you honour, Lucia, infinite honour! I did not question your good faith, remember, for a moment" (the girl's hand returned to his arm again), "but his. Has Gerald ever come forward and honestly sought to establish his innocence to your father and to you? If he has not, I repeat that he has not acted as any man with speedy intention of marriage in his heart must act."

In the morning Robert Dennison had first formed the idea of some day utilizing Gerald Durant's generosity

to himself; had formed it; then put it away from his mind with a feeling of self-abasement at having thought so vile a thing. And now, seven or eight hours later—so quickly do a man's steps acquire impetus upon the downward road, he was putting it into practice with scarce a qualm. Miss Durant's heart swelled bitterly as she listened to him. She knew, only too well, that Gerald had not openly come forward as he might have done; that there had been evident evasion on his part whenever Lady Durant had pressed him for proofs of his innocence; that he had acted, in short, not as a man would act in a case upon which the vital happiness of his life was at stake.

"I don't suppose Gerald is what is called in love with me, Robert," and she turned her pale face far away in the moonlight; "not in love as people are in novels and poetry, and all that. He knows we are to be married, and that every one looks upon it as settled, and so he just hasn't taken any trouble, I suppose, to set himself formally right with papa. I don't like it, mind," she added, "and I don't think Gerald has acted quite as he ought to have done, for my sake, but that's all the anger, all the malice, I shall ever feel against him. I *know* Gerald has had no part at all in the disappearance of Maggie Hall."

"Ah! If I ever have a wife, Lucia, may she be possessed of a heart and of a faith like yours. Gerald's tardiness in asserting his innocence is, you think, no presumptive proof even of his guilt."

"Please don't argue with me, Robert, or say anything legal. I know Gerald has had nothing to do with Maggie Hall's disappearance."

"May I ask why?"

"Because—Robert, I don't know that mamma would like me to talk about this to you."

"I am very sure she would, Lucia. I am very sure Lady Durant would judge my motives aright in having brought this subject forward."

"Very well, then, if you make me speak, I must. Gerald never once thought of Maggie in the way of admiration, because you—yes, you, Robert—were so in love with her yourself."

The unexpectedness of the blow made Robert Dennison literally stagger. Was it possible—this was his first thought—that Gerald or that Maggie had betrayed him after all?

"It is not a very flattering reason as far as I am concerned," went on Lucia, in her childish way; "but then Gerald never has pretended ever not to flirt because he was engaged, and if that had been all I might have believed this story as other people have done. But Gerald would never have tried to rival you, never! I don't know why, but I feel it's a thing he would not have done."

"And may I ask if Lady Durant shares this idea of yours, my little wise Lucia?" asked Dennison, with a very sorry attempt at a laugh, as he spoke.

"Mamma? Oh, no! At least, I should think not. But then mamma never speaks of anything of the kind. The wise idea is mine, and mine alone, Robert; but I am not a bit less sure that I am right, for all that."

Dennison breathed freer again. The speech, after all, had been only one of those terrible guesses at truth which Lucia's stupid, unimaginative mind seemed to have the mysterious knack of making; a guess un-

founded upon reason, and which the next idea that gained ingress into her small brain would dispossess.

"I wish it were as you think, my dear little cousin; but, glad as I should be to clear Gerald, I really must disclaim the honour you assign to me. I never even admired this Susan—no, Mary—Maggie Hall."

"Susan—Mary—Maggie! Why, Robert, you *lived* down at Heathcotes! You were always running after Maggie at one time. You had not a word to say but about Maggie's figure and Maggie's eyes; and now you pretend you don't even remember her name!"

The dark blood rose up on Dennison's face.

"I did not know you listened to this sort of scandal, Lucia. I should have thought you, of all girls, were beyond the village *on dits* and the gossip of the servants' hall," he exclaimed, angrily.

"I never heard anything from the servants, or in the village either. All that I heard was from you, and from poor Maggie herself."

Now Robert Dennison knew well that Lucia, as a little girl, had been familiar with Maggie Hall. Lady Durant, who would let her associate with none of the children of their rich manufacturing neighbours, having encouraged the child to be friendly, in a certain aristocratic, affable little way with all the tenants' children on her father's land. As Miss Durant, of Durant, grew to be a woman, her intimacy with the pretty dairy-maid had, of course, gradually subsided into a few kind words on one side, a humble curtsy and deferential answer on the other, when they chanced to meet. Still, much of the old feeling of companionship had doubtless survived the days of outward fami-

liarity; and Dennison trembled to think what confidence respecting himself might not, in some moment of unwonted condescension on Lucia's part, have been exchanged.

"Maggie was a vain, foolish girl," he remarked, coldly. "Women of that class are always thinking every man above them in rank must be in love with them."

"Maggie did not," answered Lucia. "And as to vanity, I wonder she was so little vain, considering how you all admired her. Why, I remember—let me see, it must be about a year ago—a few weeks before she went away, there were you and Mr. Luttrell and Sir George Chester all wild about Maggie's good looks at once! It's absurd for you to deny it, Robert, or to say that you were not for ever running down on some excuse or other to Heathcotes—all of you."

"All of us; yes, Lucia. All of us—Luttrell, Chester, Gerald, and myself—but chiefly Gerald!"

"No, Robert; no, no, no," said Lucia, more firmly than he had ever known her to say anything in her life. "Gerald least of all. Gerald, in the way of attention or admiration, never."

"I can only repeat, Lucia, that when I marry, I hope my wife will be possessed of a simple trusting heart like yours. The subject is not one I can discuss more freely with you," added Robert Dennison, loftily, "and so we will leave it where it is." He most heartily wished, at that moment, that he had never gone near it at all. "I spoke to you in entire good faith, and with no thought but of your happiness, Lucia," he added, reproachfully; "and you certainly have turned the tables upon me in a way I had no right to expect."

"I have said what I think true, Robert, and I shall

keep to it. Maggie Hall never thought of Gerald, never cared for him, except as she might have cared for papa or for any of us, and she did care for you. Why, I used to watch her face as she sat in the gallery at church, and when you only walked up the aisle, she would turn white and red by turns; and once when I met her in the park, not a week before she left, and I happened to mention you, she looked as if she could have fallen to the ground with confusion. Nothing on earth will change me: Gerald knows no more about Maggie Hall's disappearance than I do."

Just at this moment, Lady Durant's tall figure appeared in the moonlight a few paces from where they stood; and in another minute, much to her cousin's relief, Lucia was reminded of the falling dew and of her delicate throat, and sent off, like a little girl of six, to the house. Robert Dennison was in no mood to recommence the Maggie Hall controversy with another member of the family, but on their way back to the house he did vaguely attempt to sound Lady Durant on electioneering matters, and on Sir John's intentions respecting the candidate he meant to support in the coming struggle.

"I know no more about it all than you do, dear Robert," was Lady Durant's answer. "Your uncle is far, very far from strong at present, and it would not surprise me if, after all, he should take no part whatever in the election. Politics have never been his vocation, as you know; and, in spite of all the talk there has been about making Gerald stand, I have very much doubt, when it comes to the point, if your uncle or Gerald either will muster courage enough to go through the trouble of canvassing."

"Trouble!" repeated Dennison, bitterly. "Imagine any man thinking of trouble when the interests of all his future life are at stake. Indifferent as Gerald is, you surely do not hold so low an estimate of him as that."

"Well," answered Lady Durant, evasively; "my own opinion is that Gerald is a great deal too young, a great deal too unsettled in his beliefs, to think of public life at present. In another five years, when he has come to your age, and I hope to your steadiness, Robert, there may be some reason in talking of all this; but I really don't see how a boy who cannot yet legislate for himself, is to do any good to his country by attempting to legislate for others. Come in, Robert," (they had reached the drawing-room window now), "unless you wish to smoke your cigar, and hear Lucia sing. I want you to tell me what you think of her voice, and what songs there are in this new opera you spoke of at dinner that would be likely to suit her."

Robert Dennison spent another hour in friendly chat with Lady Durant; listened patiently to Lucia's songs; gave grave opinions as to the disorders of Sesame the parrot; drew a pretty little design for a new Sunday-school out of his own head; and wrote down with infinite attention the different commissions in china and woolwork that he was to execute for his dear aunt before his next visit to the Court.

And still, in spite of all these amenities, and even of Lady Durant, a very rare event, tendering a cold cheek for him to kiss at parting, when Mr. Dennison was on his road back to London next morning, it did not seem to him as though his journey into Staffordshire had been a thoroughly successful one.

CHAPTER X.

"My Life is weary."

READER, have you ever known what it was to be brought to bay with fortune, when you were living alone in a common London lodging? It is a condition of human wretchedness the like of which cannot, I think, exist in the country. A new-ploughed field, a leafless forest, a snow-spread common, every dreariest country sight, could never surely equal the dreariness of this great sea of human faces, the solitude of these Babel-tongued streets, the utter homelessness of these rooms, with their dingy furniture, their airless atmosphere, their inhuman landlady. Had that last interview of Robert Dennison and his wife taken place anywhere else in the world, Maggie might possibly have rallied after it. She was a girl, with all a girl's fresh springs of life in her heart still; and who shall say that a sight of blue sky, a waft of garden-flowers, a word from a hearty country tongue, might not just then have been her salvation? But she got none of these, and she went straight to despair, as I shall show you.

"If you betray me, I swear I will never touch your hand, never look upon your face save as a stranger again."

The words rang in her tender heart, as the burthen of an unhallowed song will ring through and torture some pure soul in the delirium of brain-fever. The mask

was off at last, and she saw her life bared before her; her life, not as she wanted it to be, but as it was. Her occupation was gone. She would never, or not for years, which at her age is the same as never, live with Robert openly before men as his wife. In winter evenings she would not share his fireside; in winter nights her head would rest on a lonely pillow; in long summer days like this she would have to drag through the hours without husband, or home, or work (the last, although she did not know it, the direst privation to her). She had no high ambition. She had married Robert for love; not because he was a gentleman. A nice little cottage with a garden, the household to look after, Robert to love, children some day to nurse and work for, these, with perhaps the natural adjuncts of a very bright dress and bonnet for Sunday, had been the limits of her wildest dreams. They were over now. Robert was not going to live with her. Robert, of his own free will, had proposed that she should go away from England; had threatened that if she betrayed him, he would never look upon her face again. Her life, her hope, her desire had died by a solitary cruel blow; as yours and as mine have done perhaps, ere now, reader! and no kindly accident befell her, as in your case and in mine it may have done, to save her body from following the death of the soul.

She sat in the place where he had left her all the evening, the evening during which he was eating his excellent dinner, drinking his excellent wine at the Court, blankly staring at the pattern of the paper on the opposite wall, and at one wretched daub of a picture that hung there, and seemed in some sort to force itself as a human companion upon her. This picture was a portrait in oils of a fair,

full-blown woman of middle age, dressed in black satin, with a grand lace-collar, a brooch, watch-chain, and rings upon the fat fingers, that were crossed blandly in front of her ample waist, an aunt or mother of the landlady's probably. Was she happy? Maggie wondered vaguely. Had this woman had a husband who loved her and let her live under his roof? Had children kissed her face, children's arms clung around her neck? With a sickening jealousy she felt sure, somehow, that these things had been so. Content was written on all that smooth face and corpulent figure. The woman had possessed what made her life good, or she would never, at forty-five, have had the heart to dress out in her best, and sit down and smirk and fold her hands before a portrait-painter.

"Fancy me, five-and-twenty years on, wanting my faded face to be put in a picture!" the girl thought. "And now that I am twenty, there's no one that wants it—no one that wouldn't be glad over me the day I was put into my coffin and hid away. And I am handsomer than ever that woman could have been when she was young!" And then she got up, for the first time since her husband had left, and went and examined herself in the two feet of looking-glass that hung over the fire-place.

It was a glass that, like others of its kind, lengthened and flattened the features, and gave a sickly green hue to the skin; but when she had looked in it, in the white dress and with the flower in her breast, before Robert came, Maggie had thought, in spite of all defects, what a pretty girl she was. She made no allowances for the glass now. She saw a pale hard-lined face, without beauty, without grace, without

youth. This face was hers; and the thought that she was not even handsome any longer, gave a sharp finishing blow to her heart—the sharpest blow, perhaps, that, in her present state, she could have received.

Late in the evening the lodging-servant brought in her tea as usual. She was a slip-shod, gaunt-eyed child of sixteen, with a brain confused by constant bells and scoldings, and limbs prematurely exhausted by excessive work; a poor, stealing, falsehood-telling little London slavey, but attached to Maggie because she was lenient as to cold meat, and had given her a faded Paris bonnet or two, and an old smart parasol.

“Law, Miss, how dull you must be, sitting alone here! If I’d a’ known the gentleman were gone I’d a brought the tea-things up before. Wouldn’t you like a slice of ’am with your tea now, miss? I can run over the ways in a minute and get a plate for you. Fourpence-halfpenny the quarter of a pound.”

The offer was not a disinterested one. Maggie, in her attempts to get away from the loathsome lodging cooking, had had plates of cut ham before; on each of which occasions the half-starved girl, knowing that the second-floor never “troubled” about her cut meat, had had what to her was a saturnalia of animal food on her way down to the kitchen. But the hoarse voice that spoke, the eyes that looked at her from that dirty face were human, and a choking sensation rose in Maggie’s throat. Here was one person at least on the earth—this poor forlorn lodging-house drudge—who would not stand by hard-eyed, as every one else in London, in the world, would, and see her misery!

“I’m not hungry, Mary, thank you. I made a pretty good dinner. Just bring my bedroom candle

up at once and"—she hesitated strangely as she said this—"you can eat the cold lamb for your own supper if you like. I shan't want it any more."

When she was alone she drank a cup of tea, and then tried to put some bread between her lips. She could no more have swallowed it than have swallowed a stone; it seemed hard and tasteless, quite unlike any food she had ever eaten in her life, and something in this new sensation frightened her. Was she going to be ill, alone, here?—to be ill and to die, perhaps, without seeing Robert again; without letting the people "down home" know that she never had been a wicked girl, or disgraced them while she lived!

She went across to her window, seated herself, and looked wearily from behind the blind at such life as at this time of an August evening was to be seen in Cecil Street. If she could only tire herself she would sleep, the thought; and, after she had slept, things might look different. And so she stayed on and on, until the city clocks chimed midnight, and till the aching heaviness of her eyes and brain made her hope that forgetfulness indeed was at hand.

But it was not. When she had undressed herself—for the first time in her life not folding her clothes neat and trim, but leaving them lying on the floor, just as they fell from her—when she had undressed herself and laid her head down on her pillow, instead of sleep her sorrow came back to her with redoubled strength. This fact of no longer caring for herself made her realise how utterly she was uncared for by Robert. Till to-night she had always liked the labour of brushing her hair; did not he admire it?—telling her that its silky smoothness, its glossy black, were

lovelier than all the red-dyed, frizzled locks of fashionable ladies; had liked to hang up her dress and speculate as to whether she could wear it one more day to "look fresh" or not; had sat often half an hour or more trying this little bit of finery or that before the glass, and feeling a zest and pleasure in her good looks as she noted the effect of each. All this was over. He had ceased to love her. What good was her youth or her beauty? What interest had she in her hair or dress, in anything, for the matter of that? A girl without a girl's vanities; a wife without a wife's honour. This was to be her future life. No use glozing it over. She was not to live with Robert. Unless she forfeited the last possibility of his love, she was never to tell the people down home that she was not living a life of shame. And then the burthen of all her misery, Robert Dennison's last cruel threat, rang again and again through her heart.

One, two, three o'clock struck; and still her eyes had not closed. She was unused to sleeplessness, and, like the bitter taste of the bread, it frightened her. Could she do nothing to get sleep—one blessed hour of sleep—ten minutes—any sleep to stand between her and yesterday? In the cupboard of her sitting-room, she remembered, there was a little bottle of laudanum that the landlady had once persuaded her to send for when she had face-ache. Perhaps if she drank some of it it might send her off, or make her forget herself, or ease her heart in some way. She got up, struck a light, and went and fetched the bottle from the adjoining room. "Laudanum—Poison," was all the information the label conveyed. People who buy laudanum generally understand the quantity of it that

will suit their purpose. At all events the law of England does not require chemists to give them any more special information than that of "Poison." Maggie held the bottle up to the candle and wondered what was the quantity she ought to take. She had a profound instinctive horror, like all country people, against medicine, and was resolved not to take an over-dose. The rector's wife down home used to take a table-spoonful of some mixture of this colour for palpitation, she remembered; but she wouldn't take as much as a table-spoonful herself. She would try a tea-spoonful first, and if she didn't feel better, take more in half an hour. And so she measured out a tea-spoonful, she who had never had opium in any shape, never taken a narcotic or a stimulant stronger than elder wine, and put it to her lips.

Had she swallowed it, the story of Mr. Dennison's future life might have been a very different one: but the bitter vapid flavour of the laudanum made her leave more than a third in the spoon. She took in reality between thirty and forty drops perhaps; a powerful dose for her with her overwrought brain and exhausted frame; then put out the light, laid her head down tight upon her pillow, and resolved to force herself to sleep.

And the mockery of sleep did, for a time, overcome her. When she had been still about a quarter of an hour, a sort of stupor, for the first time that night, stole over her brain; a delicious feeling of relaxation accompanied by ever so faint a sense of numbness, made her tightly-clasped hands fall asunder from her breast; and she began to think, with an indescribable ecstatic joy, of the fresh green fields and shady

lanes of Heathcotes. This lasted — who shall say how long? she could not have told herself, when next morning she looked back upon the night, whether it was for a moment or for an hour: then, suddenly, a loud rumbling noise, some heavily-laden waggon going down the Strand already, though day was not yet breaking, brought her back with a start of consciousness to where she was, a semi-consciousness more horrible by far than all the hours before, when she had lain wide awake, and thinking with clear vision of her trouble. Bodily pain of the acutest form was added to her suffering now. Her mouth was parched and poisoned; an iron hand seemed to clench her head; every limb felt tortured by its position, and yet unable to move from it. It was a waking nightmare; for awake she was: the light from the street-lamps, mixing already with some greyish on-coming of morning, fell upon the furniture around the room, and she saw it all distinctly. She was here in Cecil Street, and Robert had been cruel to her—the eternal burthen here still! and her life was spoilt, and she was not to have home or peace or honour for weary years. Not one sharp point blunted of her actual grief! And then again, close following upon this, and horribly mingling with Cecil Street and the dingy furniture of her rooms, she saw the fields at Heathcotes, no longer green and fresh; but parched, desert, stony. And she toiled through these fields long, seeking her herd in vain, and when at length she came upon them, they took fright and rushed away from her a space, and then turned and looked at her. And Daisy, and Star, and Flower, the dainty gentle beasts she had tended as if they had been her sisters, were gentle no longer. They had hard ferocious eyes; they had human

faces; they changed into a crowd of men and women, a noisome crowd on a London pavement, and she was among them, fainting, and alone, and crying for Robert! And Robert did not come. The hoarse din from the now-awakening streets, not the voice that should have soothed her, broke in on her dream again; and then with a start she sprang from her pillow, and found that day—God! another fresh, happy, summer day—was shining in upon her face.

The very thought of sleep had become too hideous for her to attempt to court it again. She got up, and with stiffened, aching limbs, tottered across the room to the window, opened it, and looked out. Five o'clock struck at this minute—the hour at which, summer and winter, she had left her bed at Heathcotes; and suddenly all the scene upon which her little chamber window looked, rose up with vivid distinctness upon her memory. She saw it as it must be looking now on this fair August morning. The sycamore that brushed her pane, and shaded half the trim-kept flower-garden in front of the farm-house; the laurel hedge and wicket-gate that bounded the garden from the road; the village-green and the horse-pond; the town-tree and the foot-worn space where the children played beneath its shade, in fancy she could see it all; could hear the cawing of the rooks in the distant woods of the Court; the hearty voices of the harvesters as they started, their sickles slung across their shoulders, to their work. Her fancy showed her this: what did her senses show her in the flesh? Houses black with smoke, with gas, with all the nameless exhalations of London, barring the sky away not thirty feet from her window. In the street beneath, the following human beings:—A youngish-looking

man, his face half deadly pale, half fever-flushed, walking along with slouching steps, and with no great-coat to hide his embroidered wine-stained linen, the remnant of a dandy's bouquet in his button-hole; his well-cut but disordered evening clothes; a man about whom it was safe to assert that his night had been spent in losing money—perchance higher things than money—and who was now carrying away with him the time-honoured fruit of such pleasure. Two wan-faced girls, with holes in their boots and mock roses in their hats, the elder of whom looked about seventeen. A man or woman, a human being at least, huddled in rags, drunk or asleep on the doorstep of an opposite house. Finally, and approaching the last-named object, doubtless to move it on from unconsciousness back to despair—a policeman.

The morning, of course, had broken upon thousands of pure and happy lives in London on that second day of August. These were the lives on which Maggie chanced to see it dawn: the servants of sin: the waif and stray of the street: the mechanical wooden-faced representative of the law. Of each of the two first classes she had only such acquaintance as an honest nurtured country girl could have; but scanty as was her real knowledge of life, one thing about these people was as distinctly patent to her at that moment as it was ever to the statesman or philanthropist who makes such subjects his study—their misery. Was the man in his evening dress a sensualist, a gambler, reaping only the rightful harvest he himself had sowed? Maggie neither knew nor reckoned. She had had one look of his bloodless face as he went along, and it was miserable. Were those young girls—the age of Miss

Lucia's eldest Sunday scholars at home—to be accounted sinners; or sinned against? She never thought about it. They were hollow-eyed and hoarse-voiced; for she heard a sorry word from one of them as they passed: they were miserable. And the human animal crouched in rags that the policeman was already attempting, not too gently, to dislodge from its brutal sleep? Miserable, miserable. Where was providence? Where was God's mercy? Had He forgotten all these people? Was she to know for certain that He had not forgotten her? Down home there was the little church still, and the minister's pitying voice to call back to rest all those who laboured and were heavy laden; down home there were Miss Lucia and Lady Durant to speak to on Sundays, and Sir John himself to be the friend of everyone who hungered, or who sinned. But home was shut against her: lost for ever, unless she regained it at the horrible price of losing Robert. And salvation out of Heathcotes, happiness without Robert, seemed alike impossible to her—nay, the very idea of alien consolation never even crossed her mind. All her nature was love. Common sense, hope, religion itself, had gone down in the crash that love had newly sustained.

During the day that followed, food passed Maggie's lips twice. A mouthful of bread loathingly swallowed for breakfast; another smaller quantity with a cup of tea in the afternoon. She was no longer frightened at its bitter taste now. She had grown apathetic to the wan image, with lustreless eyes and bloodless cheeks, that looked at her from the glass as she moved about the room. If she was going to be ill, did it matter much? She would see Robert once first; of that she was

resolved; then lay her head down on the first stone she came to, and die. Death couldn't be very much worse than her sleep had been after she took the "stuff" last night. She hadn't been a bad girl; she was not much afraid of death. Only—only she must see Robert, kiss his lips again, and make him swear to tell them down in Staffordshire that she had been his wife, and had not brought disgrace on them while she lived.

At about six o'clock she went to her bedroom, packed up all her clothes and trinkets, carefully labeling her boxes "Miss Neville," the name she went under, and then sent for the landlady and paid her bill. She was going to leave England—this was the story she always told when she left her different lodgings—but was to spend a couple of days with a friend in another part of London first. Her boxes should be sent for, either to-night or to-morrow morning.

This done she put on her shabby walking-things; said good-bye to the servant, pressing her dirty hand lightly as she deposited in it a parting gift, and then left the house and walked slowly away towards the Temple.

Her white forlorn face met with scanty notice in the streets: an occasional rude stare or jostle, perhaps, amidst the crowd of men hurrying westward from the city: but nothing so marked as to frighten her until she had nearly reached Temple Bar, when the following incident befell her: an incident almost laughable to write or read about, but that was fraught with intensest agony to her, coming at the time it did.

In her hurry of going out she had taken small notice of how she dressed; had put on her shawl awry perhaps; or folded it so as to trail on the dusty pave-

ment as she walked. Something, at all events, there was in her appearance—the dingy velvet hat in August, possibly—which attracted the notice of a small errand-boy of about eleven, who, an empty basket over his shoulder, was loitering at an eating-house window whistling the last street tune vehemently as she went by. Her eyes chanced to meet his; and in a second he had twisted his features into a grimace, diabolically expressive of amusement and contempt: the genuine gamin's weapon of aggression all over the world. The blood rushed into Maggie's face, and her tormentor with delight saw that he had got hold of a bit of amusement. The girl had "risen," an accident that not once in a thousand times occurs to these urchins among a London crowd. What followed I hate to write of. He pursued, or more truly preceded, her by about two steps; looking back into her face; and ever and anon giving whoops or unearthly whistles, in that sort of ventriloquistic tone which long warfare with the police teaches to the whole gamin race. He asked slang questions about the poor black velvet hat, he put her through the whole *peine forte et dure* with which his education had acquainted him.

In happier days Maggie would have been as callous as any woman living to the child's persecution—if indeed it amounted to persecution; he was but indulging his instinct for sport, as anglers or huntsmen do, unmindful of his victim's pain. She was no carefully-nurtured lady, but a robust country peasant girl, accustomed to keep a dozen rough farm-servants as much in their place as she liked; but in her present state of bodily and mental abandonment, this child's conduct seemed like the last indignity that fortune could offer

her. She had sunk so low that children mocked at her as she walked abroad in the streets! Writhing under his jokes and grimaces, ever hoping that she had lost her tormentor in the crowd, and ever seeing his mocking face again just ahead of her, again she went on until she had passed Temple Bar. Then, suddenly, the thought struck her that she must be close to where Robert lived. What would he think of her arriving on foot and with soiled dress; perhaps with this dreadful companion jibing at her even at his door. With an abrupt impulse she turned and spoke to him:

"Where is the Temple, please? I'm quite a stranger here."

Her voice was hoarse and weak, and the words came falteringly from her dry lips.

"The Temple? why this be the Temple, in here to the right." With the first word his victim spoke the gamin had become human. He looked at the woman with a sort of pity. A human creature who could walk along the Strand and ask the way to the Temple was something removed from his experiences altogether. She wasn't drunk, he saw, nor an idiot; the two phases of humanity most exquisitely ludicrous to a street-boy's perceptions; perhaps, in spite of her shabby hat, she was a lady too grand to know her way, and ready and able to present halfpence to persons who should point it out.

This last wild imagination was confirmed on the spot by the woman drawing out a purse from her pocket. She took a shilling from its scanty contents, and held it to him. "Get me a cab, child," she said, faintly. "I can go no farther."

"It isn't thirty yards," said the boy, "nor twenty

neither. I'll show you the way—just where you see the Bobby a-standing."

He gazed at her in a sort of rapture. It was the first time in his life he had possessed a shilling of his own; and the vague fear struck him that if a cabman even were called upon the scene his unlawful gains might be wrested from him.

"It ain't worth while to call a cab, it's only as fur as that there Bobby," he repeated. "You come alonger me, and I'll show you the way, miss."

The voice even of this child, who had hunted her down in her misery, had power to touch Maggie yet. It was a good sign that he spoke civilly to her, she thought. Could Robert spurn her when even this little outcast of the street behaved humanely to her at last?—forgetting, poor heart, that the humanity had been purchased by a shilling!

The foolish thought gave her failing limbs strength to totter on anew. The child, hiding his shilling cunningly in his brown hand, guided her past the "Bobby" to her destination, and in another five minutes Maggie stood, her breath coming in sobs, the cold dew standing thick-around her whitened lips, at the door of her husband's chambers.

CHAPTER XI.

Adrift in London.

THERE were few things Robert Dennison undertook which he did not do well, but, perhaps, the giving of small dinner-parties was the one thing in life he did best. No man better understood, than he, how to introduce his wines at exactly the proper moment; no man better understood—the ulterior object of the evening being loo—how to promote conviviality among his guests, and yet keep his own brain cool and collected, as a host's should be. His little dinner on the 2nd of August, his last party this season, promised to be an unusually successful one. Gerald Durant's place was to be filled up by another guileless Guardsman, young Sholto McIver (a blue-eyed boy, to whose somewhat vacuous face Mr. Dennison had taken one of his sudden kindly fancies), and the other three guests were all of them young men, and of the cheerful, open disposition he best liked in his companions.

"I don't care a bit about whether I win or lose," he was accustomed to say, with charming frankness, when play was discussed. "In fact, I care very little really about cards, as cards; but when three or four men dine together, a game of loo serves to pass away the evening, and what I do like is to have fellows who will play pleasantly; one ill-tempered man spoils the enjoyment of the party."

So on the present occasion there was not one ill-

tempered man invited. All were delightfully fresh in the belief that to take "miss," when first in hand, is a winning system of playing loo; also that Robert Dennison was one of the best-hearted, most genial fellows living. And, in very good temper, Mr. Dennison had seen to the arrangement of the table and the wines; and now, just at the moment when his wife rang at the bell, was finishing dressing in the adjoining room; whistling low to himself an air from *Fidelio*, but incorrectly—an ear for music was the one gift Robert Dennison did not possess—as he gave the last finishing touch to his incomparable whiskers, before putting on his coat.

Maggie was announced to him vaguely, by his boy, as "a young person;" and expecting to see the lad from the confectioner's with the ice, or the girl from Covent Garden with the peaches for dessert, Mr. Dennison, after a minute or two, walked good-humouredly into the dining-room, admiring the newly-shaped nails of his white hands, as he walked, and whistling, still out of tune, that air from *Fidelio*.

Maggie had turned with her face away from the bright evening light, and for one moment after he entered he saw only the gilded outline of a woman's figure, standing with her back to the window, and did not recognise her. She was about the height of the girl who brought his fruit and flowers from Covent Garden.

"Half an hour late, again," he cried, in his kindly, condescending way; "half an hour late, again. I suppose I must excuse you this time, but —— Maggie!"

She had lifted her veil, and with a sudden movement was at his side.

"Don't be angry, Robert! please don't be angry—I shan't do it again, but I wearied so to see you!" And she caught his hand, his cool, newly-washed hand, smelling of almond soap, and set off by stud and ring, and faultless linen, and held it tight between her own poor shabbily-gloved ones, then lifted it to her lips. "Don't be angry with me, Robert, now don't! It is for the last time."

Robert Dennison's face grew dark with passion.

A man not at all a villain might well be enraged at such a visit, when any moment might bring three or four open-eyed bachelor friends into his chambers. But he kept his presence of mind and, instead of speaking at once, thought. What would be the quickest way of getting rid of her? To take care that no such visit should ever, by possibility, occur again would be to-morrow's work. In the first moment that he recognised her he decided about that. His task now was to get rid of her: noiselessly, good-humouredly, quickly; above all, quickly.

"I don't want to be angry with you, Maggie, but really you ought not to have come here. Some men are coming to dine with me, and if you were to be seen, you know, it ——"

"It wouldn't matter much," she interrupted him, in a voice curiously unlike her own, and with a short, bitter laugh. "They don't know you are married, and you could easily explain my being here. They'd none of them be much struck by my beauty, for certain! The worst they could do would be to joke you a bit for your want of taste. Look at me, Robert," turn-

ing her face suddenly round to the light. "I'm not looking handsome to-day, am I?"

Her pure, marble skin was saffron-hued; her blood-shot eyes had lost their brilliancy and their colour; a strange drawn look about the mouth had oldened her by ten years from what she was when Dennison had seen her last.

"You are looking very ill, Maggie—awfully ill! This kind of thing won't do at all. You are fretting yourself to death, child, about nothing. Now, just let me send for a cab at once, and do you go home, like a good girl, and to-morrow—"

He moved his hand out towards the bell, but she caught tight hold of it again. "If you send for a cab for me I won't go in it. Where am I to go to? What do you mean by 'home?' I've paid off the lodgings and left them. You may send for my things to-morrow, if you like; and there is nowhere for me to stop but here. Robert, will you let me stop here? It's my rightful place you know."

Then Robert Dennison scrutinized his wife's face and way of speaking more closely, and a new suspicion overcame him—a horrible, a gross suspicion; but remember, his mind was gross, unimaginative, unsympathetic, ever putting the coarsest, most common-place interpretation on the action of every man or woman with whom he had to deal. That sallow skin, this thick utterance, those lustreless eyes, these trembling hands! How could he have been so blind as not to see the true state of the case at once? It was not a matter for argument or gentle treatment at all. This miserable girl had sought the usual refuge women of her birth do seek under their vulgar troubles; this girl whom he had been madly in love with, his wife, whom

in another five minutes three or four of his friends would find in such a state as this in his chambers.

"You will get into a cab in one minute's time, and you will go to your lodgings. Tell the people you have changed your mind, and must stop there another night, and to-morrow, to-morrow early, I shall see you." And with no very gentle force he took her hand from his, and rung the bell.

Maggie stood passive while he ordered the boy to get a cab, "a four-wheeled cab immediately for this lady." Then, when they were alone, she came close to him again, and put her arm up round his neck. "I'm glad I've been here, dear," she whispered, unconscious of the repulsion of his face, "I'm glad I've seen you looking like this." She passed her hand half-frightened, half-admiring, over the silk facings of his dress-coat. "You were dressed so the first evening I ever began to think of you, Robert; the evening that you walked down to the farm with the other gentlemen after dinner. You were the handsomest of them all; and you joked me and asked me if I'd got a sweetheart; and then, when the rest were gone—do you mind?—you stopped and talked to me over the laurel hedge; and when you went away you asked me to walk next night by the plantation, and I went. Ah, I'm glad I've seen you, dear! It has made me soft again. Robert, I have always loved you. Mind that when I am gone."

He shifted uncomfortably from her clasp. The pure warm arm around his neck, the satin head upon his breast, her words, her gentleness, recalled to him Maggie in the days of his short-lived passion for her, and shamed him out of his base suspicion of a minute ago.

But his eyes fell at this very moment upon the time-piece, and he saw that it wanted five minutes only to eight o'clock, and at eight o'clock his friends he knew would be in his room.

"I don't know what you mean by 'gone,' Maggie. You are no more likely to die than I am; and as to leaving in any other way, you told me pretty plainly yesterday your intentions about that."

"And I'm of the same mind still, Robert. Are you? Are you determined still you will not have me to live with you?"

"My dear girl, what is the use of discussing all this now? We settled everything yesterday, very amicably indeed, as it seemed to me."

"I see. I won't keep you any longer. I'll go away quietly at once, for fear your friends should come. How comfortable you live here, Robert!" for the first time looking about her and examining all the luxury of that bachelor room, its pictures, its velvet hangings, its divans, the perfect dinner equipage upon the table. "It all looks so nice after—well, that don't matter now—I shan't go back there any more. Is this your bedroom in here? Let me see it. I won't be a moment. I'd like to see every room you live in before I go."

Robert Dennison hesitated. Then it occurred to him that he had best humour her awhile, if only to keep her in her present temper, and he pushed open the door of his bedroom for his wife to enter. The chambers were small, in accordance with Mr. Dennison's present modest means, and there was no room that he could use as a dressing-room; so all his toilet appliances were, per force, in his bed-chamber. They were costly in the extreme, and neatly arranged, although

he had just finished dressing, as if they came from a valet's hands. Maggie walked up to the table and examined them curiously.

"I remember this little bottle, Robert; you bought it for me in Paris. These ivory-handled brushes, and this, and this," and she pointed out one or two little trinkets, "you had upon our wedding tour. All the rest are new. I mean, I never saw them before. You have everything so nice—and lace, too, real lace, on your toilet-cover. Robert, I'm glad I've seen how you live. I know now you could never have been happy in the poor way that would have been enough for me. I don't wonder so much that you didn't care to come and see me in the lodgings. I know now how ugly and dingy everything must have seemed to you. That dreadful room, with its bare floor, and the dark, dull paper." And indeed she shuddered at the thought of that mean garret in which her last miserable night had been passed.

"I am a poor man, Maggie," said Robert, sullenly; for he began to think that kindness was not the way to make her hurry her visit, "and I can keep you no better than I have done. The things you are so bitter about are things I had before my marriage. God knows there has not been much money for spending on useless trumpery since."

"No, of course there has not," she answered, quickly; "and I don't want any of them. I want nothing any more. Robert, dear, won't you say good-bye to me kindly?"

"Of course I will; there, there, that will do. Now, be sensible, Maggie, and go back to your lodgings; they are not at all bad lodgings in their way, and I'll come to-morrow, if I can, and—"

"You'll not find me there, Robert. I am going away. I am telling you no untruth."

"How do you mean going away? I don't know what you mean, child."

Mr. Dennison's lips trembled nervously. In that moment a glimmering, a horrible suspicion of the truth flashed across him, and his heart leaped. She had threatened him before in her fits of passion to make away with herself. How, if the threat he had so often sneered at had meaning in it after all. He did not dwell upon the thought. In the dark days to come he strove to say to himself that he had never really for one moment entertained it. But his heart leaped. This he knew right well. This haunted him—haunts his pillow still. His heart leaped. And he spoke no one tender word, gave no one kindly look of returning love, when a word or look of his might have brought Maggie back in a moment from the shadow of the dark valley to hope and to life!

"What I mean? No, Robert, you needn't know; you will know soon enough, perhaps. At all events, I shan't trouble you any more. After I have gone away you'll think of me kindly, dear, won't you? And if ever a day should come when you can say a word for me to them at home, you'll tell them I was an honest girl always, Robert? Promise me that!"

"Of course, of course, Maggie. Everything will be set right some day. I told you so yesterday;" and he took his watch out uneasily, and held open the door for her to go out.

She stood silent for a moment, a bright flush rising up over her white face; then she walked quickly across the room, laid her head down on Mr. Dennison's fine

lawn-covered pillow, and kissed it. "Robert"—she had come to him again, and was looking straight into his eyes—"I'd have been a good wife to you. If ever you are free and marry a lady born, she'll not love you better than I did. If—if"—she was uttering her last hope, and it almost choked her in the utterance—"I don't ask you; but, Robert, if you would let me live with you, I think I could learn to be a lady yet."

At this moment the time-piece in the next room struck eight.

"Will you go, or will you not?" exclaimed Mr. Dennison, with savage emphasis. "I want you to leave the place quickly. Don't oblige me to make the servant a witness of this lovely scene."

She shrank away instantly from him, like a beaten child; never touched his hand, never sought his lips again, but walked across the sitting-room and out upon the stairs, and away from the house, without so much as turning back her head. Some dim hope, some human longing, at least, for life, had haunted her heart to the last. When she laid her head upon the pillow—that was its place by right—a flood of tears had been ready to flow forth and heal the over-wrought brain. A kiss from Robert's lips then, and she had cast herself at his feet, ready to be his slave for evermore, but instead of the kiss had come words crueller than a blow—and she had obeyed them! And life was over; she knew it now. She had not another hope, not the shadow of a hope, left. Life was over.

The cabman held open the door of his cab as he watched her come out; but she passed on without even seeing him—on out of the Temple into Fleet Street

again. The world had got quieter, it seemed to her, during the half-hour that she had been with Robert. The light had faded somewhat; the crowd upon the pavement grown less dense. It would be easier to die now than when the world seemed so marvellously full of life—the sunshine gilding every human face that met her in the crowd! easier still in another hour or two, when the light should have died away altogether, and the streets be more at rest, and the river flowing on dark and silent as she had so often watched it of a night from that bay-window of her lonely lodging in Cecil Street.

She walked on, without feeling very tired now, and at last found herself standing among two or three hungry-looking wretches before the window of a pastry-cook's shop. There were some little three-cornered tarts upon a plate on the counter, and she thought she could eat one, and went in and bought it; but the woman who gave her change stared at her, or Maggie thought so, and she felt too ashamed to sit down, and went out again.

"You have left the tart," called out the woman; but she went on out of the shop without turning. The smell of food had made her deadly sick, and she did not care to meet the woman's eyes again. If she could have a glass of water, she thought, she could drink it; but she had not courage to go into another shop. People looked at her suspiciously, she began to feel. The last policeman she met turned his head after her, she was sure, when she had passed. She must get away into a quiet street; some street, if she could find it, near the river; or upon a bridge—London Bridge, surely, could not be very far away—and crouch into a corner

where no one would see her, and wait. Wait for night and peace and rest, eternal rest, and forgetfulness of Robert.

She went on and on along Fleet Street, on up Ludgate Hill, and past St. Paul's; then, directed by a little girl of whom she took courage to ask the shortest way to the river, through a labyrinth of the small streets or lanes intersecting that part of the city between Thames Street and the water—lanes made up of warehouses and granaries, with a narrow track of road just wide enough for one waggon to pass, and with weird-looking galleries or gangways stretching across overhead. London, in these regions, is wonderfully quiet at eight o'clock of a summer evening. Sometimes a whole lane, or block of warehouses and offices, would be closed, with scarce a single passer-by to break the silence; and at last, in a certain narrow passage, more deserted even than the rest, the loneliness seemed so profound that Maggie took courage to creep inside a portico before an office and sit down. The river was quite close here; she could hear the occasional dull plash of the tide; could see the masts of the barges and funnels of the river-steamers passing up and down; and she turned her head from the sight and bent it down on her lap. She wanted, she hungered to die; and yet the sound of the river, the sight of the vessels made her afraid. To die, in theory, had been easy enough; but these brought before her the actual physical terrors of death. She took off her gloves, and held her bare hands before her face with a sort of feeling of comfort from their warm touch. She turned her head, as I have said, from the river. She felt that life—any life, life without Robert even

—was sweet. If, at that moment, she could be back in her lodgings, she thought, how good it would be to see the servant-girl's face, and to have her supper, and go to her bed and sleep. The close, dull rooms, the noisome food, the ceaseless din from the streets without, were unutterably better than what she had before her now. They were life.

And if at this hour Maggie had sunk insensible, and a policeman had borne her to the nearest station-house, and the commonest bodily attention had been shown her, probably by next morning all the darker dream of suicide would have passed away for ever. Instead of that good fortune I will tell you what befell her. A young girl threw up a ground-floor window, not many yards from where she sat, and then put herself at a piano, just where Maggie could catch a glimpse of her figure, and sang. It was not a region in which you would, ordinarily, expect to hear operatic airs; but here, as in all dull, airless city thoroughfares, some human beings were obliged to spend their lives, both winter and summer. This girl was the daughter of some poor clerk, or warehouse keeper, perhaps; whose one vanity had been in the child's boarding-school education, whose one extravagance was the child's piano. At all events, she sang; and sang prettily; with a tuneful, touching voice, and modest grace; and the melody she chose was the one dear to the school-girl heart in every country of Europe—"Robert, c'est toi que j'aime."

That song, so trite to the ear of civilisation, was like a key-note to the one golden period of Maggie's life. In Paris, Mr. Dennison had taken her, a three days' bride, to the opera; and Patti's voice had em-

bodied for the English girl's ignorant heart all her yearning, voiceless passion for her own Robert. She never heard the song before or since, but its melody had at once sunk deep into her remembrance; and after the first few bars she knew it now. "*Robert, c'est toi que j'aime.*" Her husband had told her the meaning of the words, with tenderest looks, with furtive hand-pressure, then, and here—a forlorn outcast in the London streets—they came back to her.

"*Robert, Robert!*" She waited until the girl had sung the first verse of her song; then started up as if some living thing had stung her, and hurried on her road again.

Weak though she was, she had strength to get away quick from the exquisite pain that tune had the power to inflict upon her, and, in a minute or two, found herself by the waterside. She made her way down a long line of wharf, ever and anon stopping and looking, with fascination rather than with horror, down into the river beneath; then suddenly raising her head she saw that she was close beneath the dark, massive arches of a bridge—London Bridge she thought it must be, for Robert had taken her once to see the city, and she remembered that London Bridge lay in the position this did from St. Paul's. It was now between nine and ten o'clock, and such wayfarers as darkness brings forth down by the river, were congregating thickly upon the pavement. But Maggie heeded none of them. Women stared at her, but she felt no shame; men spoke to her, and their words never reached her ears. She was insensible of the foul, tobacco-laden, spirit-charged atmosphere through which she had to struggle on. "*Robert, Robert!*" this was all she heard;

this echo of the dead past was all from which she wanted to get away. She kept in the direction she had chosen as steadily as her fast-flagging strength would allow; in a few more minutes had nearly climbed the steps that lead from the water-side up to the bridge, and then felt that a fresher, colder, purer air, was blowing upon her face.

The pavement on both sides of London Bridge was thronged with foot-passengers. One forlorn wretch like herself would never here, she felt, arrest the attention of any one: and so, after walking along a few paces irresolutely, she crept into the shadow of one of the recesses, and cowering down there, her head leaning against the wall, set herself to wait. Wait until she knew not what! until the crowd had lessened, or the lamps paled, or the last brightness of evening had died out of the sky! She suffered less now that she was quiet than she had done all day. Her head felt light and wandering, but not as it had done after she took the laudanum the night before. Now past things came back to her unmixed with any consciousness of the present. The house at Heathcotes, the plantation where she had first met "Mr. Robert," her place in the village choir, where he could see her from the squire's pew: then her three weeks of Paris, and carriages and theatres: lastly, Robert's bachelor rooms, with the beautiful dinner-service, and the lace upon the toilet-table, and the fine lawn-covered pillow, and the perfumed cold hand that she had kissed! All came back to her, and painlessly. Misery, after a certain point, becomes its own anæsthetic. The recollections of life, the prospects of death, were no longer more poignant to Maggie than they would be to a man under the in-

fluence of chloroform. Robert wanted her no longer; and she had come here to die; and it was good to rest in this dark corner, where no one could stare at her and guess her secret. . . .

This was about as much human emotion as it was now left to her to feel.

CHAPTER XII.

"You have rejected me."

THE Morteville public ball was advertised in the Morteville *Courant du Jour* for nine o'clock. It was an understood thing, however, that no persons of fashion appeared in the rooms until half-past nine at the earliest, and Mrs. Lovell, ever a slave to conventionality, determined, too, not to look as if they wanted to get all they could for their money, had ordered the carriage—a crazy fiacre, bespoken a fortnight beforehand, so scarce were even crazy fiacres in Morteville—to be at their door at twenty-five minutes precisely before ten. Ten minutes going to the Etablissement would bring it to the quarter; they would then have five minutes to attend to their dresses in the cloak-room; and at ten minutes before ten would enter the ball-room. They could not be wrong, for the Sous-préfet's carriage was ordered at exactly the same hour, and the Maire's also.

But long before seven o'clock Archie Lovell was in her bedroom, not actually dressing—the putting on of her frock and wreath could scarcely by possibility be made to last out two hours—but lingering over all the fresh delicious details of this, her first ball toilet. Taking up her shoes (Mrs. Lovell, by dint of heaven knows what household parsimony, had managed to purchase them for her), and making sure for the twentieth time that the rosettes were firmly sewed on;

gazing at her gloves—she was afraid to do more than gaze at them they were so delicate and white; hovering round the diaphanous cloud of white drapery that lay upon her little bed; occasionally trying on her wreath with cautious fingers, and wondering whether it would look well a hair's-breadth higher or lower on her forehead; and finally leaning over and smelling a magnificent bouquet of white flowers that had been left for her by "un monsieur, mais un petit monsieur très très comme il faut," as Jeanneton said, in the course of the afternoon.

Most English girls have had the edge of enjoyment taken off their first real ball, by all the children's parties, and half grown-up parties to which they have gone since they were babies. But no such premature dissipation had blunted Archie Lovell's keen instinct for pleasure. Dancing had come to her, as she told Mr. Durant, by nature. All foreign servant-girls can dance; and from the time she could walk alone she had danced, after a fashion of her own, with her *bonnes*; also with the peasants, or with her father's artist-friends, at the out-of-door fêtes in Italy which it was Mr. Lovell's special pleasure to attend. Inside a ball-room she had never been. She had never worn white gloves and shoes; had never had on a low dress; never seen an artificial flower closer than on the altar of the Catholic churches till now. And she stood and gazed at them all—all this paraphernalia of the order of womanhood with which she was about to be invested! with the same sort of reverence that a maiden knight of old might have felt while he watched his armour on the night before the *accolade*. When she looked down at the short linen dress and shabby shoes she had on, she

almost pitied herself. How had she been happy so long while jasmine wreaths and white grenadines, satin shoes and snowy kid gloves, were worn by other girls and not by her? Would it be possible—the thought chilled her—to put on the linen dress and shabby shoes to-morrow morning, and go on with the old daily dull routine as usual? A strange sense of the mystery, the inequality of life, smote her as it had never done before. The white shoes and gloves would be dirty to-morrow, the dress soiled, the flowers withered, and Mr. Durant gone. On this first night of August she was to taste the fulness of earthly enjoyment; to be dressed in a white dress six yards and a half in circumference; to go to a ball; to dance twenty-one dances, most of them with Mr. Durant; not to return perhaps till daybreak; and then afterwards, for the rest of her existence ——

"Archie, child, you will never enjoy the ball if you think of it so much beforehand," broke in her step-mother's voice at this point of her reverie. "Balls are doubtful pleasures at the best, and even if you move in the highest society—and it's likely indeed—you won't leave your seat twice. More than an hour you have been here, and now I find you looking at your dress still."

"But if I am not to enjoy the ball, Bettina, how lucky I can enjoy looking forward to it!" answered Archie, with unconscious philosophy. "If I don't leave my place once, nothing can take away the pleasure I have had in my imaginary successes. Now you, who are hopeless beforehand, and mean to be bored, according to your own account, when you get there, have not

a single moment of compensation throughout the whole affair."

"Except when it is over," murmured Bettina, meekly. "At my age, and in our position, gaiety can never be anything to me but a cross, selfishly speaking. When I was your age, Archie, and in the very highest county society, perhaps I used to look forward to a ball as eagerly as you do, but now—*Jeanneton, folle fille, que fais-tu avec ma robe?*" she interrupted herself abruptly, as *Jeanneton*, bearing away her mistress's best dress from the kitchen, where it had been hanging by the fire, passed before Archie's door. "*Prenez garde de ces grosses pieds de votrel!*"—Mrs. Lovell's French was still imperfect—"and *tenez the chandelle droit*. Archie, tell that idiotic woman in French to mind the grease. I wouldn't have a spot on my mauve moiré for all I'm worth."

This mauve moiré was the dress Miss Curtis had worn on the day she led Mr. Lovell to the altar. At that date it was termed violet; but when the word mauve came into fashion Mrs. Lovell called it mauve: and almost made Archie, who was simple then, believe on the strength of the change, that it was a new dress. To bring it down to an approximate fashionable length, velvet of a suitable colour had been added from time to time round the skirt; but for the bodice alteration was impossible, dresses having been cut at the time of Miss Curtis's wedding with considerably tighter bodies and sleeves than a modern riding-habit. On all great festivities Mrs. Lovell wore the mauve moiré, hanging it for a day beforehand by the fire, with faith in this process taking out creases and making it equal to new. She wore, in addition, on the present occasion a white

lace shawl and a pair of black satin shoes, all descended from the wedding; a garnet necklace and earrings, and lappets of real point on her head. Archie had often been accorded glances at these treasures one by one and with solemn mystery, by her stepmother. She had never so much as imagined the possibility of their being brought out before the eyes of men all at once; and when, after a lengthened absence, the two women met, dressed, in the little salon, her admiration for Bettina knew no bounds.

"In our different styles we shall be the two best-dressed women in the room, Bettina, depend upon it!" she cried, with all a child's belief in everything and everyone belonging to herself. "Your dress is perfect now, perfect—and I don't mind saying so! Papa," appealingly to Mr. Lovell, who had come in, and was literally feasting his eyes on her—on his child, I mean, not his wife. "Isn't Bettina looking nice? Isn't the effect of the white lace over the mauve really beautiful?"

"Beautiful!" echoed Mr. Lovell, absently, and never taking his eyes from the girl's face, "beautiful! and so like. I never knew how like till now. You see it, Bettina?" after a moment's pause. "Nay, nay—how should you? Your gown looks very well, my dear,"—he had not called her "my dear" three times since their marriage—"and you have dressed the child admirably. I wish little Taroni were here to make a sketch of her."

"Indeed, I think little Taroni made quite sketches enough of me," cried Archie, petulantly, and dancing away to take another look at herself in the glass. "For once, papa, don't think of me as a model. To-night I

am neither peasant, nymph, contadina, nor any other atelier lay-figure, but a human being; and, which is more, a young lady. I can hardly believe it of myself though, yet."

But although she disclaimed her father's compliment, Miss Lovell might in good truth have stood for a model at that moment—a model of Diana, of Hebe, of any impersonation in whose beauty, youth, health and freshness are supreme. Her evening dress revealed a neck and arms not dazzlingly white, but of a fresh wax-like texture, and exceedingly shapely; a neck and arms with no Juno-like proportions, for plumpness and dimples are not exactly what the mind connects with the imperial goddess, but girlish and graceful. Her hair, unbound, fell in silken plenty over her shoulders and far beneath her slender waist. A little round jasmine wreath was set coquettishly on one side of her head, and admirably suited her mignonne, sparkling face. No necklace round her throat; no bracelets on her arms. The white dress—the little wreath—the natural flowers in her hand—were her sole adornments. She looked like what she was—a child playing for the first time at being grown up; and a certain something not unfeminine, but unconventional, in her brusque way of jumping about in her fashionable skirts, heightened the suspicion that to be iron-clad and trained was a discipline to which time as yet had not accustomed her.

"Enjoy yourself, child," said Mr. Lovell, as at twenty minutes to ten he put her and Bettina into the carriage. "Show me your silk shoes quite worn out to-morrow morning." And then he stood, and by the dim light from the solitary lamp of the Rue d'Artois,

watched the fiacre that bore her from his sight. Watched with the first vague jealousy of Archie he had ever known; the jealousy every father living, however generous, however manly, must, I think, have felt at times for the child who is a child no more; the jealousy which makes the last chapters of Jean Valjean's life so touching a poem. Archie was his little one no longer. He thought of the old Dresden days, when he used to walk with her in his arms about the market in the early summer mornings. He thought of the broken patois of her baby voice, of the determined clasp of her baby hands; and with a choking feeling at his breast went back to his study—to write something about Archie, or about the feelings of some other father at first seeing his girl a woman? No. If Frederick Lovell had ever described any of the common things he himself felt or did, he might have been a poet. He went to pile up scores of inflated images about florid sunsets over meridian plains—the like of which he had never experienced, and which, consequently, could never interest any other mortal being to read of.

Meanwhile, Archie and Mrs. Lovell arrived safely at the Etablissement, and after an interval—a breathless interval to Archie—of disrobing, made their way to the dancing-room. Was the Maire there? the Sous-préfet? Mr. Durant himself? For a good many minutes Archie knew and saw nothing. A mist gathered before her eyes; her limbs felt heavy; in spite of all her efforts, she knew that her lips trembled as she walked along.

"Don't be shy, child. No one is looking at us or thinking of us," Bettina whispered to reassure her, and

Archie answered, quite sincerely, that she was never less shy in her life. All she felt was delight, "and—and anxiety for a partner, Bettina," she added. "I shall never get over the shame if I sit out the first dance."

She was for walking up and down the room, and so giving any male acquaintance who might be there a chance of coming up and inviting her to dance; but Mrs. Lovell, better versed in propriety, insisted upon sitting down at once. All the seats in the best position of the room were already filled, and so they had to take their places not far from the door, and somewhat hidden from general view by one of the pillars of the colonnade that ran round the room. Archie could have cried as she sat down. Once planted in this odious place, probably none of the young men would think of asking her to dance at all. The band struck up a waltz, and she watched men asking other girls to dance, and then, tra-la-la, tra-la-la, off they floated in a delicious melodious whirl that made her heart positively ache as she sat there, excluded from its mazes. Just at that moment little Monsieur Gounod, one of the partners upon whom she had depended, appeared through the doorway, resplendent; his boots shining like looking-glass, his fierce moustache waxed and twisted up nearly to his eyes, a turned-down collar to show his throat, and a gorgeous expanse of open-work shirt, with pink silk gleaming underneath: very nice, indeed, Archie thought Monsieur Gounod looked. And, instead of coming up to her, he went off straight to Madame the Maire—horrid little time-serving, fawning man—and madame, in spite of her forty years and her stalwart waist, smiled and bowed and attitudinized her

assent, and then these two went off, tra-la-la, tra-la-la, like the rest; and Archie Lovell remained sitting still.

Would she have a better chance by standing up? When the interminable waltz was ended, and people were beginning to engage their partners for the next dance, a quadrille, Archie made this suggestion to Bettina, who, a great deal happier than her stepdaughter, was just then counting, with intense interest, the number of gores in Madame the Sous-préfet's skirt. "Stand up?" yes, certainly; there would be no impropriety in standing up for a minute or two. As to talking of a "better chance," it was absurd even to expect to dance yet. Not until all the ladies of consequence had danced, ought Archie to dream of a partner. And then Bettina fell, with vital eagerness, again to the measurement of Madame the Sous-préfet. If, as she believed, there were ten gores in her dress, it could have been made with fourteen yards; and that arch-traitress Annette, the work-girl, had declared that, to her own certain knowledge, Madame the Sous-préfet always had sixteen yards in every dress she wore. Women like Mrs. Lovell, I verily believe, enjoy a ball-room most. To young women it is an arena; they are the actors, the matadors and the picadors in the fight. The vicissitudes of success and defeat have all to be borne by them—and with smiling faces! The women who neither hope nor fear for themselves are the calm spectators; and they derive edification—unintelligible to women under thirty, and to men of all ages, as the raptures of Spaniards at a bullfight are to the people of other countries—from every minute detail of the conflict before their eyes. Ten gores in the skirt? Yes, Annette must be an impostor; for she said no dress

could be made with an even number. And the front width just touching the ground; not ridiculously short, half way up to the knees, as Annette declared was the last Paris fashion! When Madame waltzed again, she would be able to see if the dress was lined—another point on which she had the gravest suspicions as regarded Annette. And all this time Archie's heart was beating so loud she thought it must be heard, and her cheeks were flushing, and her poor little teeth were set hard, to keep her mouth from trembling at the thought that another dance would begin and find her without a partner.

However, standing up brought about better fortune after all. Just as the sets were forming, and as Bettina whispered that it was undignified to keep any longer on her feet, up came young Willy Montacute—the third string of Archie's bow—and asked her to dance. Young Montacute was very young indeed, and very shy, and very plain to look upon—never mind, he was a partner, and Archie went away with him joyously. She was the more delighted to have secured him when, a minute later, there resounded that peculiar ostentatious rustling of silk, which only the movements of very under-bred English persons seem capable of creating, and the great Mrs. O'Rourke, with old Maloney and suite, bridled and languished into the room. For worlds Miss Lovell would not have been found sitting out, partnerless, by her enemies; and she felt quite grateful to Willy Montacute for having asked her, and smiled at him, and chattered to him, and danced pretty little steps of her own to the quadrille-music; and only now and then looked eagerly to the door, whenever any new face appeared there, in the hope that it

might be Mr. Durant himself come at last to dance with her!

When the quadrille was over, her partner asked her if she would take any refreshment. She was a great deal too much excited to require bodily sustenance, and was desperately afraid of touching anything that could take the freshness from her gloves before Mr. Durant had seen them. However, any risk would be better, she thought, than going back to her place by Bettina; so she said "yes," and went with Master Montacute to the refreshment or ante-room, where they pretended to flirt, as they regaled themselves on two glasses of sugar-and-water. Then they came back to the ball-room, and Willy Montacute inquired if he should take her to her place. "I'd like to ask you to dance this galop with me," he remarked, as Archie rather faintly assented, "only I dance so vilely, I don't like to try with any one but my sisters."

"Oh, I dare say we should get on very well," said the girl, readily. "I'm not much of a dancer myself—I mean not much of a ball-room dancer—but I used to waltz a great deal out of doors, with different people in Italy, and I generally managed to get on pretty well with all of them."

Thus encouraged, young Master Montacute put his arm round her waist, and after one or two false starts, they got off. The youth had underrated his own powers; he was by no means the worst style of bad dancer—having good wind, a tall figure, and just address enough to tread on the feet of other people, not of his partner. What he really wanted were nerve, firmness, and pluck; and conscious of these deficiencies he went at a pace, when once off, that defied honest

competition. If he slackened, he felt he might break down; if he stopped, that he might not make so good a start again.

"You are not tired? You don't want to stop?" he gasped occasionally, as they fled along; and Archie, too breathless to speak, told him each time, by a nod or shake of her head, that the pace pleased her. Not till the music ceased, did they stop; and by this time Miss Lovell's cheeks were little damask roses, and her blue eyes were full of light, and her long hair was all tossed about—some of it clinging, indeed, around young Montacute's arm—and her jasmine wreath, which had fallen off in the course of one of their false starts, was hanging over her arm.

"Just like a Bacchante," Mrs. Maloney, who was standing near, pronounced her to be; hiding away her own modest old eyes behind her fan—the while, for fear of contamination.

The rooms were now filling fast; and as Archie Lovell walked along, her singular beauty began to attract universal attention. She knew it, and with delicious flutter, said to her heart that she would not have to sit out many more dances that night; and she was right.

Just as young Montacute was leading her back to the corner where Bettina sat, a gentleman came up, his opera-hat under his arm, and with a profound bow, asked Miss Lovell in excellent English, to allow him to put down his name upon her card. He was a young Russian prince at present staying in Morteville (and coveted as a partner by every woman in the room), and Archie's face flushed up with delight.

"I shall be very glad, indeed, to dance with you,

but I have no card. There have only been two dances yet, and I danced both with the same partner."

Willy Montacute volunteered at once, proud even of this vicarious relation with aristocracy, to get her a card; and while he was gone Miss Lovell stood and chatted with great unconcern to the young Russian. If she had gone through half-a-dozen London seasons, she could not have looked and felt more entirely at her ease than she did at this moment; the boldness of a child taking, in her, the place of acquired and conventional courage. Shaking her hair back across her shoulders, with her face upturned, her head, as her trick was, a little on one side, she stood quietly talking to the prince, as if she had been used to talk to princes all her life; isolated, as it chanced, for the moment, from any other group; with no fan to flutter—women's usual stay on such emergencies—and her bouquet calmly held and never raised, as an embarrassed woman must have raised it, for one instant to her face.

As she stood thus, Gerald Durant entered the ball-room. He had expected to see Miss Lovell looking pretty—in a somewhat school-girl style of prettiness; ill-dressed probably, as women in the provinces invariably are, and dancing violently with some young member of the Morteville bourgeoisie. He saw her a vision, with bright falling hair, with radiant eyes; dressed in as faultless taste as though Elise had been her milliner; and with the handsomest and best-born man in the room at her side. How well pleased she looked at this miserable little foreign nobleman's attentions! How she showed her white teeth, and shook back her tawny locks, and turned her head aside, or shot glances at him from her blue eyes, just as she had done the day

before at Mr. Durant himself! When young Montacute brought the card, the Prince took it from Archie's hand and wrote his name down for several dances—and as he asked for each, Miss Lovell smiled and gave a pleased nod of her head. If Gerald had only played at being in love with her before, he felt strongly that it would be play no longer now. They had met on equal ground at length. Archie was a woman to be won, not a child to be played with; and there was a rival worthy of the effort to be distanced. The fairest woman living would scarcely have been worthy the trouble of winning to Mr. Durant without that.

He moved away among the crowd, so that Archie did not see him; and when she had returned to Mrs. Lovell, he stood close beside her chair before she knew that he was in the room.

"Miss Wilson, I suppose there is no use in my asking you to dance?"

Archie in the seventh heaven of delight, was just showing Bettina her card with the Prince's hieroglyph written no less than four times upon it. "I don't know how to pronounce his name, Bettina! There are two zz's, you see, and a double f, and a capital C, and no vowels to speak of; however, that doesn't matter—he is a prince. I don't care what else happens now. . . . Yes, Bettina, my wreath fell off, and you may keep it," throwing it down in her stepmother's lap. "I was without a wreath when *he* asked me to dance, and I am content!" She was just in the middle of her triumph, and of this somewhat heartless speech, when Gerald's soft caressing voice—so unlike the Prince's little piping falsetto—interrupted her.

"Mr. Durant, I never knew you were here! I

shall be delighted." And she jumped up, not doubting for a moment that he meant to ask her for the next dance, and took his arm.

"I hardly thought I had a chance," he remarked, as he led her away through the crowd. "When I came in and saw you giving all those dances to that Russian fellow, I never expected that I should get a single waltz. Confess you had forgotten me, and the dances we were to have had, until I came up and asked you."

"Indeed I had not," answered Miss Lovell, feeling, guiltily, at the same time, how nearly he had guessed the truth; "I had been wondering—oh, wondering whether you would ever come all the evening! I mean ever since I have been here."

"You have danced every time, of course?"

"Yes." How thankful she felt he had not seen her whirling with Willy Montacute! With her hand on Gerald Durant's arm, and with the Prince's name written four times over on her card, how miserable seemed her little triumph with poor Willy!—how resolved she was to ignore him for the remainder of the night, and of her life! "I have danced, but I did not enjoy the dances much," she added, demurely.

"They were not with the Russian, then?"

"No. His are all to come."

"I see. Miss Wilson, you have the rare virtue of sincerity."

They had now reached the inner or dancing space of the room, and Archie, a great deal more keen for waltzing than for sentimental flirtation, quitted Mr. Durant's arm at once, and gathered her muslin skirts a little together with her right hand. She had come

to the ball to dance twenty-one dances, and had no idea of losing unnecessary time.

"Shall we really go through it?" suggested Gerald, who had the natural prejudices of a bored Guardsman of five-and-twenty against round dances. "I see a room looking delightfully cool and empty away to the right. I mean, don't you think by-and-by we shall find it less crowded for dancing?" he added, in answer to the blank surprise of Archie's face.

"By-and-by? Yes, I dare say we shall; but why lose a waltz now? Surely in London you dance in greater crowds than this?"

The disappointment of her look and tone was unmistakable. Mr. Durant saw that any man who aspired to Miss Lovell's favour must make up his mind to dance himself thereinto; and he heroically resolved to waltz, as he had said to Dennison, like a student, for the remainder of the night.

"I'm so fond of dancing, and it's such a treat to me," she pleaded, as she rested her little hand upon his arm. "You must remember this is the first ball I have ever been at in my life, and you are my second partner. It's very different for you who have been having nothing but balls and pleasure all your life."

She need not have apologized. Before they had gone half round the room, Gerald felt that he was enjoying this waltz as he had not enjoyed any dance for years. The floor was first-rate, the room not overcrowded, and his partner—perfection! He had danced in his time with excellent dancers of all nations and of all classes; but this little girl suited him better than all. There was something contagious in her own irrepressible enjoyment; in the verve, the buoyancy with

which she moved. In London drawing-rooms, and at Mabile, at the Tuileries, and the Staffordshire county balls, the same feeling of non-amusement had been ever wont to oppress him. Young women might be beautiful, or excellent dancers, or sought in vain by other people; Gerald had invariably had the same feeling while he danced with them—that a quiet flirtation in some dim-lighted conservatory would be better. But Archie's was the very poetry of waltzing; her flowing hair, her happy parted lips, her grace, her *abandon*, divided her from every other woman with whom he had danced in all his life before. In a waltz, as in everything else, the girl's most potent charm for Gerald Durant was in this—her individuality. He had known women in classes hitherto, and each class, in turn, had bored him. In Archie, for the first time, he saw a girl who could divert him for any number of hours with her merry tongue; who would let him smoke as he talked to her in the moonlight; who would dance as she was dancing now, answering with a merry smile every little bit of nonsense he whispered, and still who was as removed as Lucia herself from the very detestation of his heart—fastness. No grisette could be more amusing than this child; no countess more refined. And then her heart was as pure as her face! Gerald Durant held no more exalted opinions of human nature than most men hold, to whom a plentiful supply of money and a commission in the Guards have been given at nineteen; but this virtue may be put to his credit—he believed in women whenever he met with one worthy of belief. And Archie's charm for him—the charm that was the key-stone to the rest, and without which she would not have been Archie, but

one of a class—was her innocence. Smoking beside her in the moonlight, or here with his arm around her waist in a crowded ball-room, it was the same. There was always something cold in those blue eyes; some girlish mocking ring in the little laugh; some lingering bloom of childhood on the red lips that held him, as it were, very far away from her. Charm without a name! Charm that if Rachel or Breidenbach could only distil, and label “Dew of the morning,” or “Maiden Blush,” and sell at five guineas a packet, would fill their shops with fashionable ladies, I imagine, from morning till night.

When the waltz was over, Archie had the honour of dancing a quadrille with the Prince, and very insipid she found him after Gerald. No well-bred Russian or Frenchman is ever anything but insipid to an unmarried girl. Still, he was a prince, and Miss Lovell, for vanity's sake, enjoyed this quadrille exceedingly. Were not Mrs. O'Rourke, and the Maloney, and poor Miss Marks, partnerless, looking on with wide-open eyes? Was not little Monsieur Gounod, from his distant bourgeois set, trying hard to attract her attention? Was not Bettina standing on tiptoe, and nodding encouragement to her from afar? Was not Gerald Durant—here lay the gist of the whole triumph—standing near in a doorway, speaking to no one, and watching her intently? When the dance was over, and she had walked round the rooms on the Prince's arm, then stood in a conspicuous position eating an ice, while he waited deferentially upon her and held her bouquet, Archie wondered in her heart whether life *could* ever bring back any happiness so intense as this? Every one who passed glancing at

her with admiration—Monsieur the Prince humbly holding her flowers—Mr. Durant still watching her from the doorway—Mr. Durant's name written, too many times to count, upon her card! Could happiness like this be repeated often, and was—sudden as light flashed this thought upon her—was the feeling she had toward Mr. Durant, or the Prince, anything resembling love? If so, love was a very charming thing. If this fairy-scene of light and flowers; these attentive, handsome partners, in their primrose gloves and silk-faced coats; if this new, intoxicating sense of her own beauty were all, indeed, the inauguration of the great romance of life, how much better that romance was than she had imagined! Ivanhoe at the feet of Rowena, Clive Newcome claiming Ethel at last, were situations that had hitherto touched her deeply. But how pale and prosaic were they compared with this! She was certain Rowena never felt to Ivanhoe as she did to Mr. Durant—no, the Prince—Mr. Durant—which in the world was it? Ethel Newcome's love was very well in its way, but Ethel Newcome went through dull, long years, away from Clive, and gave up the world, and took to school-teaching and district-visiting—while she—she would never give up the world or take to anything but balls, and pleasure, and beautiful dresses. She would marry one of her slaves, the Prince probably—and have a white silk and diamonds, and a pink silk and pearls, and she would give three balls a week, and go out to three, and let poor Mr. Durant be the first on her list of partners sometimes, and—

"Mademoiselle, will you accord me a dance?" said little Monsieur Gounod, obsequiously, at her elbow, just as the Prince was putting down her plate. "Made-

moiselle has been so surrounded, I could not approach her sooner."

Dancing with Monsieur Gounod was rather a descent from being a princess, and entertaining in silks and diamonds three times a week; but remembering that there might be future Morteville balls without princes, and without Mr. Durant, Archie graciously gave him a dance very low down on her card (she smiled at the notion of Monsieur Adolphe Gounod's petitioning her for dances, and her condescending to give him one); and then Monsieur the Prince handed her back, through the discomfited, neglected host of O'Rourke and Maloney, to Bettina's side.

That enchanting evening waned at last; alike for Archie as for the plainest, most unnoticed woman there, or for poor Bettina—every gore in every dress in the room exhausted—asleep in her chair. Miss Lovell had danced her four dances with the Prince, and knew now that she would never marry him; also that his well-cut coat, and perfect gloves, and high-bred manner, were his greatest charms. And she had danced with other young and well-looking partners, and knew that she cared for none of them as she did for Mr. Durant. How much was it that she cared for him? She asked herself this quite late in the evening, as they stood together, her hand resting on his arm, and a sudden, odd, choked feeling in her throat was her answer. She liked him, for certain, more than she had ever liked any man, save one; and that was years ago—a child's liking merely. Liked him, as in this wandering, vagabond life of theirs, it was scarcely possible she would like any one again. With a sudden re-

vulsion of feeling she felt that she hated all foreigners, princes included; hated artists; hated the men her lot would and must lie among. What she should like would be an English home among English people; the world that was Gerald's world; the country that was his country. Was this love, or approaching love? She knew not. But Gerald knew there was a softer look than he had ever seen in her blue eyes; a tremble in her voice whenever she spoke of the coming day—nay the day that had already come and must divide them.

"Let us leave off dancing now," he whispered to her. "We will return and have the last dance of all together; but let us rest a little now. There are people walking outside on the terrace; and the moon makes it as light as day. Let us go too."

They went out together on the broad gravel promenade, a plateau that divides the Etablissement at Morteville from the shore, and walked at once to the end furthest from the ball-room. It was high tide; and the calm glassy sea broke in monotonous cadence on the sands. In the extreme west the waning yellow moon lay close to the horizon; the sky was white with stars above their head.

"What a glorious sky!" cried Archie; and, all involuntarily, her hand rested heavier on his arm. "Mr. Durant, when you are in London, I wonder whether you will look back, and think of to-night?"

From any woman but Archie the speech would have been a leading one; and Gerald forgot that it was Archie who spoke, and in a second had carried her little gloved hand to his lips. "I shall never forget to-night, Miss Wilson—never while I live. As to

my return to England," he added, tenderly, "there is no occasion for me to go there at all, unless you bid me do so."

She caught her hand away from him; her heart beat violently; a scorching blush rose into her face. A minute ago she liked Gerald so that she could have cried to say good-bye to him; now she very nearly hated him. What right had he to kiss her hand—her hand that no man's lips but her father's had ever touched? What right had he to bend his head down so close to her? "I—I don't know what you mean, Mr. Durant. How can it depend upon me whether you go or stay?" And as she spoke she took off her glove—the glove Gerald had kissed—and laid it down upon the little stone wall that formed the boundary of the terrace.

At this moment she might have been an excuse for any folly, any madness—with the moonlight turning her mass of waving hair to bronze, and whitening into snow the soft outline of her girlish throat and arms. A wild desire came upon Gerald to snatch her to his breast, then and there to give up Lucia, and content himself, beggared, for the rest of his life with being the master and ruler of that face and of those blue eyes that were gleaming at him with so very little of subjection in their expression now.

"I have offended you," he exclaimed, quickly. "Miss Wilson, tell me at least that I have not offended you hopelessly?"

"Offended! No, Mr. Durant; that is not the word." But she kept well away from him as she answered, "You have only surprised me. If it had been that Russian Prince or Monsieur Gounod I should have

care less. All foreigners make ridiculous speeches, I believe, and kiss ladies' hands, and perform such antics. But you—an Englishman! No; I did not expect it."

"Antics? A man carried away by an impulse too strong for him kisses a hand—a gloved hand!—like yours; and you call his impulse an antic?"

"I do," with a burst of sudden passion, "unless—unless, of course, he cares about her!" her voice changing as Gerald had once before heard it change, when she approached the subject of love.

"And if he did care for her?"

"Ah! I know nothing about that. I mean—I mean ——" and then she turned her face quite away from him, and was silent.

Gerald was at her side in a moment. "Archie," he cried, "I do care for you! I would give my life for you! Will you accept it?"

He stood for a minute, not trying even to take her hand again. Then Archie turned. Mr. Durant could see her face full in the moonlight, and he knew that it looked less like a child's face than it had ever looked before. Her eyes were downcast; a little nervous tremble was about her lips.

"Mr. Durant, how am I to take this?" she asked.

A dozen Belgravian mothers in conclave could not have decided upon a better question than this, which Archie's untutored instinct taught her.

"To—to take it!" repeated Gerald, but not without hesitation. "Miss Wilson—Archie—can there be any way but one in which to interpret my admiration—my devotion?"

Admiration, devotion, fine words, but that fell with

a blank sound on Archie Lovell's ear. She was very young, she was thoroughly unhackneyed; but every warm affection, every strong, honest, natural feeling lay dormant in that childish heart. Gerald's kiss shocked her by its abruptness, and for a moment she had felt outraged, frightened; then, when he pleaded with her, when he said, tenderly, "I do care for you; I would give my life for you," her heart seemed all at once to stir with a violent pulsation, and she had stood irresolute (that was when he watched her lips tremble), simply waiting with a sort of fear for his next words, and for whatever new emotion should master her.

"How am I to take this?" she asked mechanically, as she waited thus; and then Mr. Durant broke forth about admiration and devotion, and for him Archie Lovell's heart never beat as it had beat in that one loud stroke again. By a hair's breadth only had she escaped loving him. But she had escaped it. The first false ring of his voice, the first stereotyped words of flattery, had saved her; and she was unconscious, both now and hereafter, what danger this was that she had run.

"I interpret your admiration and devotion thus, Mr. Durant. Here, in Morteville, an uncivilized sort of girl, called Archie Wilson, has made your time pass pleasantly to you. I know very well I have done that; and when you get back to England you will think of her—well, kindly always, I hope; but with about as much pain as Archie will think of you. *Voilà!* Let us be friends. You wanted to see how much my head was really turned by all it has had put in it to-night. Have you a cigar? You may smoke it if you have."

And with a little spring she perched herself on the wall, in the careless attitude in which Gerald had seen her on the day of their first meeting.

"And your glove, Miss Wilson? Is it to remain here? You don't want to touch it again, I suppose."

"I don't want to put it on," said Archie, carelessly. "I can dance the last waltz very well without it, can't I?"

"Oh, quite well," said Gerald, bitterly; "or, if you choose, the dance can be given up. Anything rather than that you should be reminded of my folly." And he took up the glove (warm still, and bearing the print of her little hand) and tossed it into the next wave that broke upon the sand. He, Gerald Durant, the courteous, the *débonnaire*, had actually lost his temper, for almost the only time in his life, with a woman.

The first thought that crossed Archie's mind was regret for the glove. Bettina had given four francs the pair for them, saying that if you got the best they would wear for two balls at least, and clean afterwards. She had meant to be cold, dignified, when she took the glove off and laid it down, to purify it as it were from Mr. Durant's kiss; but she had never meant ultimately to abandon a piece of property worth two francs. This was how the ball she had enjoyed so intensely was to end! She and Gerald were fast becoming enemies. She could hear the notes of the last waltz already, and instead of dancing it, they were quarrelling here; and then, as a pleasant finish to it all, she would have to drive home and be scolded by Bettina for having lost her glove.

"And so you don't even care to dance with me

again?" she said, after a minute, and turning her face to Gerald. She was too proud directly to allude to the loss of her glove. "So much for your devotion, Mr. Durant; it has not lasted long."

"You have rejected me, Miss Wilson."

"I rejected your fine speeches, not you. You know it."

He did; he knew that they had only been fine speeches; that he had meant to flirt desperately with poor little Archie; not to marry her; and that her delicate woman's instinct, not any worldly knowledge whatever, had made her value his declaration at its exact worth. Could he be angry with her long? Was she not, in truth, too good to be trifled with? Should he mar the remembrance of their brief acquaintance by parting from her in bitterness? And did not the tears that glistened in the poor child's eyes even now tell him that at her heart, and in her simple way, she cared for him still?

"In spite of your cruelty to me, I shall always feel the same towards you, Miss Wilson. You may be very sure of that."

"And we will dance the last dance together, then, after all?"

"Of course we will, if you will only forgive me first. I shall be too utterly miserable, Archie, unless you forgive me!"

She not only forgave him, but held her hand to him in token of forgiveness; and then they returned slowly along the terrace to the ball-room. Just as they got to the entrance-door, Miss Lovell drew back, and hesitated. "It looks strange, does it not, to dance with only one

glove on? How would it be, do you think, to take off the other too? Better, eh?"

"Yes, certainly better," said Gerald, "and as it will be quite useless to you, you may make it a present to me. I shall like to have something that was worn by you/to-night."

She took off her glove, touched in her inmost heart by his wish to possess it, and gave it him without a word. Gerald folded it reverently, put it in his breast-pocket (he has that little faded glove still: the only love relic kept from his youth) and then they went into the ball-room. It was almost cleared now, the band was playing the "Faust Waltzes" deliciously—the bright moonlight, streaming in through the open doors and windows, made the lamps pale as though it had been broad day.

"It was too good to last," said Gerald, as the last notes died away, and while Archie's hand still rested on his shoulder. "For the first time in my life, I have found a ball too short."

"And I, too," said Archie, "I think I should have liked that waltz to last for ever—except for Bettina."

On their way home, Bettina made inquiries as to her satin shoes.

"In ribbons," answered Archie, laconically, and holding up a tiny ragged foot for her stepmother's inspection. "So much for Monsieur Joubert and his fifteen francs."

"And your gloves?"

"Lost."

"Archie—lost!"

"One of them fell in the sea, and one of my partners has the other. Oh, Bettina, don't scold," she cried,

as Mrs. Lovell was about to exclaim. "Better one ball like this, and my shoes in rags, and my gloves gone, than fifty stupid ones, and all my clothes in correct order. It was a heavenly ball, Bettina."

"It has been a very expensive one," said Mrs. Lovell, reckoning up on her fingers; "fifteen francs the shoes; four the gloves; three the carriage—twenty-two francs, not counting the dress and wreath, which, of course, will come in again. It's no good talking of expense, certainly, now that the folly has been committed; but there's one thing, Archie, I must say to you to-night, sleepy though I am."

"What is it?" cried the girl, turning hot and then cold in a minute, and not knowing which of her own shortcomings was to be brought to light.

"Well, Archie, it isn't perhaps a moral delinquency; but after reposing confidence for eighteen months in a young woman, to find out that she is an impostor is not pleasant. Annette has told me a tissue of falsehoods from beginning to end. Fourteen yards of silk would make as handsome a dress as any in that room—and the Sous-préfet's wife had ten gores in her skirt. I said so from the first."

CHAPTER XIII.

On the Pier.

WHEN Archie woke the next morning it seemed to her that she had aged by twenty years since yesterday. She had been a child then—she was a woman now; had worn a ball-dress and white satin shoes; and danced with a prince, and with Mr. Durant, and had had Monsieur Gounod, and a dozen other little Frenchmen, at her feet. Was she better for the change? For the first five minutes of waking, certainly not. There was a heavy weight above her eyes, and her mouth felt parched, and a listless, weary sensation in all her frame, for the first time in her life, made her disinclined to move. She lay quiet for a few minutes, thinking over every detail of the ball—wondering a little, too, whether she was so very much happier for having gone to it; then suddenly recollected that she must get up and dress at once if she wished to be in time to see her father, who was going off with Bettina to Amiens by the eleven o'clock train. And half an hour later, fresh from her cold bath, and with her wet hair hanging over her shoulders, and her linen frock and her sailor's hat on, Archie, running from room to room, singing and laughing, and calling to Jeanneton for a "tartine" to eat by way of breakfast on her road to the station, was Archie again.

The Lovells' visit to Amiens had been planned for some weeks past. Mr. Lovell, wanting to attend a sale

of *bric-à-brac* that was to take place on this and the following day, and poor Bettina, for very economy's sake, determining to attend him. To prevent his bidding hundreds of francs for things that looked to her like rubbish was beyond her power; indeed, experience had taught her recently that these were the solitary transactions in life wherein Mr. Lovell did not fail, several of his later purchases of the kind having fetched double and treble their cost afterwards in Paris. But she could keep him straight in his domestic expenses. Without her he would go to the dearest hotel in the place (this morning's post had unfortunately brought him a quarter's remittance), ask any horrible Jew, or artist, or creature who took his fancy at the sale, back to dinner, and regale him with as much chablis or champagne as he chose to swallow. With her, he would be conducted to the mildly hospitable and rigidly dull roof of a certain Madame Bonnechose, wife of the Protestant pastor of Amiens, to whom Mrs. Lovell had once shown attention in Morteville. And poor Mr. Lovell, as biddable and sweet-tempered as a child in anything that merely involved his own personal discomfort, had meekly succumbed to the arrangement.

"But I wish you were coming too, Archie," he said to his daughter, as she was standing on the platform waiting to see the train bear them out of the Morteville station. "Mr. and Mrs. Bonnechose are admirable people, Bettina says, but I should enjoy their society much more if you were with me. Take care of yourself without us, little one."

"And look after Jeanneton," cried Bettina, putting her head out of the window after the train had moved. "Mind about the keys—and be sure to lock up every-

thing by eight, and, Archie, if she wants to go out—" But here her voice was lost in a prolonged and deafening shriek from the engine, and Archie could only nod and look ferociously determined, and otherwise express, by pantomime, her determination to keep jealous watch and ward over Jeanneton till Bettina's return.

She strolled back to the Rue d'Artois, thinking how slowly the time would pass till two o'clock, when she had promised—no, when she had told—Mr. Durant she might possibly be walking on the pier just at the time the steamer he was going by should start. For she had confided to him all about the old people's Amiens expedition, and Gerald, instead of crossing to Folkestone by the mail, had at once decided on waiting for an excursion-boat that was to go direct from Morteville to London that afternoon. When she got into the house, the first thing she saw was Jeanneton clearing away the breakfast things, and crying in a showy theatrical manner, as French servants do cry when they intend that you should notice their grief. Miss Lovell laughed aloud at once. Jeanneton's sorrows were well known to the household; they all arose from the ill-conduct of a certain Pierre, real or fabulous, with whom this young woman asserted herself to be sentimentally in love.

"What have you the matter with you now, Jeanneton? What new perfidy has Pierre been committing?"

"Ah, mademoiselle," wiping her eyes unceremoniously on the breakfast-cloth, "it's very well for mademoiselle to laugh. Mademoiselle has her balls, and her toilets, and her pleasures for herself, while a poor girl like me—and it would have made no difference to

madame; and to-day is his fête, and only two leagues from Morteville, and the tante is as active as a sparrow, and clean, but of a cleanness!"

Which, being interpreted, signified that Jeanneton had wanted four-and-twenty hours of leave to attend her lover's fête in her native village; that she had an aunt, active as a sparrow, willing to come and take her place in the kitchen, and that Bettina had thrown cold water on the whole scheme. As she wept and argued, and grew eloquent about "Pierre," Archie really began to believe in his existence, and to think that Bettina had been cruel. What harm would there be in her letting the girl go? "If you would be sure to be back before papa and madame, Jeanneton, I don't see why you mightn't go. There's food enough in the larder for me till to-morrow, I suppose."

"Ah, and if there is not the tante would go to market," Jeanneton broke forth; "the tante would get mademoiselle a delicious chicken, the tante—"

"Shall do nothing at all for me, Jeanneton, you may be sure," interrupted Archie, imperatively. "You may go, if you choose, but I'll have no horrible old tantes, chattering till I'm wild, and breaking every cup and saucer we possess. And whatever you do, make up your mind about it quickly," she added. "I'm going for a walk myself at two o'clock, and if you choose to go I can take the door-key in my pocket."

Jeanneton made a feeble show of regret at leaving her young mistress all night alone; then consoled herself with the remembrance that the porter's wife was close at hand, and could be called whenever mademoiselle wished; and finally, half an hour later walked off out of the house, in the very highest spirits, and in her

holiday clothes. The pretty Morteville cap jauntily set on her smooth jet hair, a pair of silver rings, nearly as large as fine ladies wear them now in London, in her ears, a crucifix on her throat, and her prayer-book neatly folded in a checked handkerchief in her hand. Not that she was going to attend the offices, but because a prayer-book was her insignia of full dress, without which she would have been no more complete than a young lady, even on days when there is neither rain nor sun, without her white parasol.

It was a quarter to one now; the excursion-steamer was advertised to leave the Morteville Roads at two; and Miss Lovell thought that, if she walked slowly, she would not be much too early if she got ready at once. How should she dress? She did not like to put on her very best things to walk about alone in. Her enemies would say that dancing with a prince had turned her head outright, if she put on her best black silk merely to walk down to the pier. Still, she would like Gerald to see her looking her best—her very best—before he returned to England and to Lucia! She looked over her wardrobe with a melancholy sense of its deficiencies, such as she had never felt before. The black silk—that was too good; a gingham or two, very much washed out, and very short in the skirt; and one checked muslin, hopelessly dirty and tumbled: this was all. Her two white piqués, the best frocks she possessed, she had worn, with reckless extravagance, during the past happy, prodigal week, and they were both at the wash. And Gerald had said he always liked best to see her in white. As she remembered this, a sudden bold inspiration came across Miss Lovell's brain. She would wear the muslin skirt that

had served as a slip to her ball-dress the night before. The audacity of the project almost daunted her at first. Bettina had declared that slip to be fine enough for a dress; that it would wear clean four more balls at least; and here was she going to put it on—clear Swiss muslin by daylight—and drag it through the dust and defilement of the Morteville streets. Dire necessities demand stringent measures. Archie vacillated and trembled before she could bring herself to commit the desperate act; once even took down the dirty checked muslin and half put it over her head; then the thought of how she would look in that other skirt—fresh, white, long—a regular grown-up woman's dress—overcame her again. Should Mr. Durant take away a last impression of Archie the tawny-haired child, the little model—the gipsy; or of Archie as he had danced with her at the ball—a young lady in fair white muslin; “dressed like other people?”

The magic of those four fatal words (which annually, statisticians tell us, are the ruin of thousands of people in all ranks) was too potent for Archie to withstand. She succumbed to the strongest temptation her life as yet had known; put on the white skirt; a high white jacket to match; a little white scarf on her shoulders; her sailor's hat, with a blue veil, the colour of her eyes, twisted round it; and a pair of lemon-coloured gloves which Bettina had cleaned up a day or two before, vainly hoping they might be fresh enough to wear at the ball. When she was dressed she ran into the salon, and stood up on a chair to see herself in the great glass. What a pretty girl she was! How well white muslin suited her clear dark skin by daylight! How she hoped every Englishwoman in the

place would meet her on her way to the pier! Would anything improve her appearance still? Yes, certainly; Bettina's best French grey parasol (a gift from dear Madame Bonnechose, who had it from her mamma in Paris, and thought it too worldly for her own use); and a flower; to make a spot of colour, in her waist-belt. The first dereliction from the narrow path seemed to have made any further enormity perfectly easy to Archie. She walked off to Bettina's room, coolly abstracted the parasol from its silver-paper wrappings; then, out into the garden, where she picked the last bright red *Géant des Batailles* that remained; the standard rose-trees being the special property of the old Countess d'Eu on the second floor, and ever regarded, till this hour, with fear and trembling, by all the other inmates of the house. Then, having collected her spoils, she went back to the salon, perched herself on the chair to arrange the rose, and to pronounce herself a pretty girl again; and two minutes later started forth, putting the door-key of the apartment in her pocket, for her walk.

The Maloney was watching her, cat-like, from behind her curtain, and Archie looked up and nodded at the wizened face with her sweetest smile; and a little further down the street she met Mrs. O'Rourke, suffering visibly from the heat, and nodded to her likewise with perfectly good temper (with that muslin dress on she could have forgiven all her enemies at once); and coming near the pier, she saw the Prince, and tried to throw down her eyelids demurely—as she had watched the great Paris ladies do—when he saluted her; and then, twenty yards further, Gerald Durant met her. He had been waiting for her for an hour, he said; and

his eyes told Miss Lovell pretty plainly what he thought of her looks, now that she had come.

They walked to the end of the pier and Archie felt very melancholy at the sight of the excursion-boat, which, with steam up, was moored at some distance out in the Roads.

"You will start soon, Mr. Durant. The people are already beginning to go off in boats."

Gerald took out his watch. "I shall go in a quarter of an hour—that is, if the vessel starts at the time advertised. I see my servant has taken the luggage off already. He is determined that I shall not change my mind this time, Miss Wilson."

"There is not much temptation to make you change it," cried Archie, trying to speak gaily. "The heat and dust, and crowds of excursionists and porters, are not likely to give you a favourable last impression of Morte-ville." For they were trying to talk polite common-places, as people who like each other invariably do on the eve of separation.

"And you will have to walk back alone through it all," said Gerald. "Miss Wilson, let me see you back, at least to the other end of the pier. I shall have quite time enough to do that."

"No, thank you, I prefer being here. I like seeing the people go off in the boats, and—and I mean to stop and see the very last of the steamer," added Archie, with sudden sincerity.

At that moment a boat pulled round under the pier head, across which they were leaning, and the boatman stood up, his scarlet cap in his hand, and asked Gerald, in such English as the Morte-ville boatmen use, if he was going to the steamer. It was a clean, trim little

boat, unlike most of the luggage-boats used for carrying passengers to the steamers; and Archie looked down at it with wistful eyes.

"What a nice boat, Mr. Durant! You had better engage it at once to take you on board."

"There is plenty of time still, unless you wish to get rid of me," Gerald answered, his eyes fixed upon her face.

"But you could row about a little first. I am sure it would be a great deal pleasanter than waiting here in the sun."

In after days, Gerald often soothed his conscience with the recollection of this remark of Archie's. But for it—but for the childish whim that prompted it—he had never brought deeper pain than that of saying "Good-bye" to him into her life. He would no more have thought of asking her to accompany him to the steamer, than of asking her to accompany him to England. But all through Gerald Durant's life, as through the lives of all weak men, there seemed to run a mysterious chain of accident that bound him, whether he willed or no, to the commission of every sort of foolish and unfortunate action. A fresh link in the chain had been supplied by Archie's last words; and in a minute Gerald turned the new temptation to the very best account, as he always did.

"It really would be much pleasanter. The sea is like glass, and I dare say the air is cool outside the harbour. You never go out in a small boat like this, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, I do, very often," said the girl, promptly. "I row about often with papa; row with my hands,

you understand; perhaps that is what makes them so brown."

"But you would not care to go now? You would not go without your papa? You would be afraid?"

"Afraid! What of? Being drowned?"

"Oh no, Miss Wilson, of—of—" Gerald's eyes fell; he did not like to say, "of what people might think of you if you went."

"Of hurting my dress, do you mean? Good gracious, no! I should enjoy it of all things, and if you didn't mind I should like just to run up into the steamer for a moment. I never was in a steamer but once, from Livorno to Civit  Vecchia, and that's so long ago I scarcely recollect it now."

In another minute the boat was hailed, and Miss Lovell, in high glee, ran down the slippery, weed-grown steps at the end of the pier, took the boatman's sun-burnt hand, jumped into the boat, Mr. Durant following; and then—then she found herself out alone with him on the transparent glassy sea, with Morteville, like a place in a dream, lying behind her!

CHAPTER XIV.

At Sea.

"How thoroughly I enjoy this!" Archie cried, laying down Bettina's grand parasol in a pool of salt-water on one of the seats, and pushing her hat back a little from her forehead. "The ball was very well, but this is better. I think boating is better than anything else in the world, Mr. Durant."

Whatever Archie did was, while she did it, better than anything else in the world. Gerald looked at the girl, and actually sighed to think that these were his last ten minutes with her. How blank all would be without the bright face, the joyous voice, this evening! How rosy life might be with this sweet contagion of enjoyment ever present! How hard, in short, it would be to return to Lucia and to the Court after Archie Wilson and Morteville!

"I can enjoy nothing heartily to-day, Miss Wilson. I am saying good-bye to you, you must remember."

"And going back to London and all your London friends," she returned, quickly. "I shall miss you more to-morrow than you will miss me."

To-morrow! The word had a strange sort of knell in it just now. Was this happy intimacy, this bright interchange of youthful jests, fancies, hopes—all but love—to be indeed cold and dead for ever to-morrow? They remained silent, both of them; Archie's

eyes fixed yearningly upon the dim white cliffs of England across the channel, and Gerald's upon her face. The boatman, meanwhile, thinking, in perfect good faith, that they were fellow-passengers bound for the Lord of the Isles, and hoping perhaps to be in time to pick up a second fare, pulled on straight for the steamer out in the Roads.

"*Nous voilà!*" he remarked aloud, almost, it seemed to Archie, before the measured fall of the sculls had sounded a score of times. "Monsieur and madame ought already to be on board."

Gerald took out his watch and declared that there were still ten minutes to spare. "Would you really like to go on board, or shall we remain as we are?" he added, to Archie. "I think this is much the pleasantest."

"No," said Miss Lovell, dreading, she scarcely knew why, to go through any more lonely farewells. "I should really like to go on board with you for a minute or two, unless you mind it. It will seem almost as if I had seen you part of the way."

The boat was now alongside of the steamer, and a couple of stout English arms were already outstretched to help Archie up the companion-ladder. As Gerald was about to follow her the boatman took off his cap and demanded his fare one franc each. "Oh, very well," said Gerald, "perhaps I may as well pay you at once. Two francs, and how much for mademoiselle's return?"

He spoke in excellent French, as far as grammar went, but his accent, I suppose, had something alien about it; something, at all events, that was alien to the ear of a Morteville boatman. To return? but nothing

—nothing. There was nothing to pay for returning; he meant with his empty boat.

Gerald, however, tossed another franc into his hand. "Wait on this side," he cried, when he had run up on deck, and was looking down at the boatman's perplexed face, "we shall be off in five minutes."

"Mais oui, monsieur, vous partirez dans cinq minutes. Merci, monsieur, merci, ma petite dame." And then, with a heightened opinion of Englishmen as regards their generosity rather than their sense, he quietly pulled off towards shore, and Gerald led Archie to the after part of the vessel.

She was as much amused as a child with everything she saw on deck, and asked Gerald presently if she might go down and see the cabin.

"Well, if we have time," he answered, "although I don't think there is much you would care to see there. How long before we leave?" he called after the steward who was passing at the moment. "Five minutes, still. Well, then, we may run down and up again, Miss Wilson, but there will not be time for more."

They went down, and the atmosphere of the cabin, with ranges of human beings on all sides already preparing themselves for sea-sickness, did not make Archie wish to linger there. As they came up the cabin-stairs the last bell rang.

"And you will only have just time to leave the vessel," said Gerald, taking her hand. "Miss Wilson, the moment for saying good-bye has come."

"Good-bye, Mr. Durant," she answered, in rather a

choked voice. "Good-bye, and I hope some day we shall see each other again."

He whispered another word or two of tender regret at parting, as he hurried her across to the gangway by which they had come on board; then—Mr. Durant stood aghast! No boat was to be seen. He rushed across to the other side of the vessel, thinking that the boatman had mistaken his orders, but nothing was to be discovered of him. The boat that had brought the last passengers was already half way back to the harbour; the steam up; the captain in his place of command upon the bridge.

"Good heavens, this will never do!" cried Gerald, the whole seriousness of the situation breaking upon him far more vividly than it did on Archie, who stood quiet, and a little pale at saying good-bye, but without any misgiving as to her own return. "Stop here for one moment, Miss Wilson, while I see what can be done."

He would have made his way, had it been possible, to speak to the captain at once; but a tide of second-class excursionists, who were being driven forward by the steward, well-nigh pinned him to his place. He breasted the crowd manfully, and after two or three minutes' hard fighting had gained the point he strove for; but these three minutes had been the loss of everything. The vessel was already in motion. He was lavish in his offers of money, but the captain was inflexible.

Cases of this kind were constantly occurring among excursionists, he said; it might be as much as his command was worth to stop the vessel. If they had spoken sooner it might have been possible to lower one

of the ship's boats, but nothing could be done now. They would stop in an hour or so at Calais, and the lady might disembark there if she chose. The Calais fêtes were going on, and she would be able to get back by another excursion-steamer to Morteville that afternoon. And this was the consolation Gerald had to bear back to Archie.

For an instant after he had told her in what position she stood, Miss Lovell laughed aloud; thinking to herself what excellent fun this mistake was. Then, to Gerald's horror, her lips trembled, and the great tears rushed up into her eyes.

"Away! I'll not go away to Calais!" she cried, passionately. "That wicked boatman, to dare to leave me here. Oh, papa, papa!" And she stretched out imploring hands towards Morteville, already growing indistinct in the distance, while the tears not only gathered in her eyes, but rained down her cheeks. "I never meant it—you know I never meant it!" she sobbed. "Oh, I wish papa was here. I wish I had never left papa."

In his heart Gerald at this moment most devoutly wished it too. The society of the prettiest woman in the world would have been dearly purchased to him by scenes or tears or trouble of any kind. "It's an awful bore, Miss Wilson; I would have given anything for it not to have happened. But—well, crying can do no good, can it? and the boat stops at Calais, after all."

"And, after all, I shall be a hundred miles from home still," cried Archie, not without temper. "What good will Calais be to me? I won't go to Calais."

She looked so pretty as she made this assertion,

her cheeks flushed up with childish passion, and the tears standing on her long eyelashes, that Gerald could not but be touched. If women will cry, it is a great thing when they know how to do it without getting ugly; and, if the worst came to the worst, it would indisputably be pleasant to have Miss Wilson's company—scenes and tears apart—as far as London. "You shall not go to Calais or anywhere else, Miss Wilson, unless you like it; that is to say, if you don't land at Calais you must come on to London, for the boat stops nowhere else, and I will see you off, or come with you, if you'll let me, by the Folkestone mail, and you will be home again early to-morrow morning."

"In time to meet the twelve o'clock train from Amiens?"

"Certainly; long before that." Gerald in reality knew nothing whatever about the hours of trains or steamers; but he spoke authoritatively, as men generally do in default of accurate knowledge, and Archie's face brightened. It was consolation, at least, to know that she might be home in time to meet her father—for the thought of him, far more than of herself, troubled her; consolation that, whether she landed at Calais or went on to London, she would certainly have time to get the silver-grey parasol back into its paper before Bettina's return. And so, recovering her common sense, Miss Lovell dried away her tears, and even rallied her spirits, so far as to be very much amused, standing by Gerald's side, and looking at the different objects along the coast all the way from Morteville to Calais.

Her adventures, however, were not destined to end yet. As they neared the Calais pier, and when again

they were talking of saying good-bye, Archie, to her horror, descried a whole crowd of Morteveilleites assembled there—Miss Marks, Captain Waters, all the Montacutes and others—Morteveilleites who had gone over for the morning to the Calais fêtes, and who were now waiting for the steamer to take them home. It had been her glory hitherto to shock these people by her childish escapades; but that was at Morteville, at her father's side. All her courage, all her sauciness, were gone with the sense of his protection; and as the Lord of the Isles steamed up slowly alongside, she clung close to Gerald's side, her veil pulled down over her face, and her heart beating too thickly for her to say a word. The tide had risen sufficiently for them to come close in; and Captain Waters recognised Gerald Durant, and called out a few friendly remarks to him from the pier. What a vile boat to have chosen for his return to London. He (Waters) wished, whatever the boat, that he was going there too. Had been boring himself all the morning at this atrocious fête, and was waiting now for some disgusting little French steamer to take him back to Morteville, *et cetera*.

At the sound of Waters's voice, Archie Lovell's heart beat thicker and thicker. "Mr. Durant, what must I do?" she whispered. "Decide for me, please. Tell me how you think my father would wish me to act. If I land here, every one of these people will see me; if I go on, and come back by Folkestone, as you said, there will be a chance, at least, of their knowing nothing about it, won't there?" And she clung with frightened, imploring eagerness to his arm.

And Gerald Durant hesitated—the passengers already coming on board; every moment worth a year of

common life to Archie—hesitated; pressed her trembling hand closer; thought how charming it would be to have her with him still; how strangely fate seemed ever to bring *him* into temptation and mischance of every kind; how—Nay, but I need not record his thoughts in full. He was simply true to his irresponsible, vacillating nature: sentimentalized when he should have acted; thought of the pleasant spending of a summer's day, not of the child's life whose marring might depend so utterly upon his decision; and in another five minutes the Lord of the Isles was on her course again—the possibility of Archie Lovell's return gone.

She stood silent until they were wholly out of sight of the people on the pier, then threw up her veil, and told Gerald, with a smile, that she felt quite brave now, and he need not be afraid of any more tears or tempers. For her father's sake, she added, she thought that she had done right to go on. It would have tortured him if the Morteville gossips had got up any stories about her going to Calais, and no doubt now she would be able to return home quietly before any of them were up to-morrow morning. How lucky that Jeanneton was safe away, and that she had the door-key in her own pocket; and how pleasant it really was out here at sea! "As I must go to London whether I like it or not, I may as well enjoy going to London—may I not, Mr. Durant? Now that everything is inevitable, and that I am sure I'll be home before papa, I feel what fun it really is to run away. (I tried to run away once in Napoli when I was little, but a fisherman caught me, and gave me up to Bettina for two scudi.) And you—you look as miserable, Mr.

Durant, as if you were a conspirator going to be caught and hung in chains the moment we arrive in London!"

"I am not at all miserable, Miss Wilson," answered Gerald, a little confusedly; for the girl's desperate ignorance of evil did, now that it was too late, begin to awaken self-reproach in his heart—"I was only envying you your rare happiness of disposition. A Morteville ball, or a Morteville luggage boat, or a Morteville excursion steamer—you can enjoy them all alike! It is enough to make a man sad, you know, when he looks on at a child's amusement, and remembers that he, alas! is a child no longer."

But although his conscience stung him sharply for a moment, before half an hour was over Gerald had ceased to think whether he was to blame or not, and had returned to all his old delight in Archie's society. His temperament always made him imperatively crave to be amused; and Archie always amused him! Their fellow passengers, French and English; the different faces, as they grew white and grim, under the throes of on-coming sea-sickness; every little ludicrous incident of the voyage, her quick perception seized upon, and put, for his benefit, into quaint and graphic language. She was excellent company always; but, above all, in travelling; for, from the time she was a baby, her father had always encouraged her *bavard* tongue at such times, and Archie had not been slow to profit by his leave to talk. How charming a winter's yachting in the Mediterranean, or a summer's sport in Norway, would be with such a companion, Gerald thought, as she chatted on: it was about the thousandth time that he had thought how charming some particular position of life would be with her; what a pity it was

that all this fine sense of the ludicrous that made a woman so companionable was a missing sense in Lucia. Poor Lucia! He had gone yachting with her once, he remembered, and she looked very green and plain, and cried because he would not attend on her when she was sea-sick, and wanted umbrellas and parasols and cloaks to be brought to her continually, under every fresh vicissitude of the complaint. Archie was not sick a bit. The healthy blood shone as bright through her clear skin on sea as on shore; the sun was not too hot for her, or the wind too cold; in fine, she enjoyed herself and made him do the same, just as she had done through all the happy hours that they had spent together during the past week. Was it possible that the whole affair might be a serious one? that destiny, not accident, had brought about this strange voyage? that in spite of Lucia—of every hope—of every promise of his life, this blue-eyed child was to be his fate after all?

It was no time or place to talk sentiment now. A fresh breeze from the west began to blow as they neared the Foreland, and soon sea-sickness in all its Promethean forms was around them. "Could we get anywhere out of the way?" Archie asked, as victim after victim fell before the rising breeze. "I don't feel ill a bit, but it certainly would be pleasanter if we could get away from all these people."

"We could go upon one of the paddle-boxes," answered Gerald, "only that you are much too thinly clad, Miss Wilson. But if you would not mind wearing one of my coats upon your shoulders, I'll tell Bennett to get you one, and then—"

Just at this moment, a stout motherly-looking old lady, who had been sitting near them all the voyage,

tottered abruptly to her feet, and with the choking terseness characteristic of sea-sickness, entreated Gerald to help her to the cabin-stairs. "If you'd like my cloak, take it," she added, turning to Archie, as Gerald, with his prompt good-nature, steadied one leviathan arm between both his hands; "the cloak—on the seat there"—and the inmates of the cabin and the steward, fortunately ascending the stairs at the moment, heard the rest.

"Good old lady," cried Miss Lovell. "The very thing I wanted! See, Mr. Durant, a scarlet cloak with a hood to it—home-made, evidently—and with the old lady's initials neatly marked on a bit of tape at the back." And then she put the cloak on—very picturesque and gipsy-like she looked in it—and ran up lightly, at Gerald's side, to the top of the nearest paddle-box. "I call this delicious," she cried, as the fresh air blew upon her face. "If my hat did not come off every minute, I should want nothing in the world. Mr. Durant, you couldn't lend me a handkerchief to tie it on with, could you?"

Gerald called to his valet, who happened to be close at hand—wonderful to say of a valet, not ill—and five minutes later the superb Mr. Bennett handed to Miss Lovell an exquisitely embroidered piece of cambric that he had taken from his master's valise for her use.

"You don't mean to say that this is a handkerchief for yourself?" said Archie, as she examined it. "Why, it's fitter for a girl, much, than for a man. Such fine batiste, and so beautifully stitched in lilac, and this fine embroidered monogram in the corner! Mr. Durant, what a dandy you are!"

"A dandy without intending it," said Gerald, care-

lessly. He rather liked Lucia to call him a dandy, but hated the word from Archie's mocking lips. "I leave all such matters to Bennett. He filled a portmanteau full of these trumperies for me before we left Paris, but I have not looked at them yet. Take your hat off, Miss Wilson, I will hold it for you, and tie the handkerchief round your head—so. Now, do you feel that you have everything in the world you want? You ought, I am sure." And Mr. Durant looked long and admiringly at the mignonne, brown face so well set off by the coquettish head-dress and scarlet cloak, and back-ground of blue sky.

"As far as dress is concerned, yes," answered Miss Lovell; "but"—she hesitated, and wondered whether she was committing an impropriety; then nature was too strong for her, and out the truth came, "but I wonder whether they give one dinner on board excursion-steamers. I *am* so hungry."

Mr. Bennett was called again in a moment, and a quarter of an hour later an excellent little impromptu pic-nic, consisting of chicken, ham, rolls, peaches, and champagne, was brought up on the paddle-box. Miss Lovell partook of it with hearty appetite that no accident could check, and which on the present occasion was sharpened by the sea air; and Gerald ate too, but by snatches; and waited on Archie, steadying her plate and holding her tumbler, and laughing and jesting with her on her awkwardness every time that a lurch of the vessel made her clutch with her little brown hands at her chicken or her bread to prevent them rolling from her lap. And so the time fled by. When they had finished their meal they were already past the Foreland; an advancing tide helped them quickly along up the

river; and at a few minutes after seven the distant chimneys and spires of the great city first rose before Archie Lovell's excited eyes.

It was a glorious August evening, and as the vessel steamed slowly up to London Bridge, the city, under the magic touch of sunset, seemed transfigured from its accustomed smoke and blackness into a veritable city of the saints; a city of porphyry, amethyst, and gold. Rank above rank, far away over the west; lay serried hosts of crystalline, vermilion clouds, gradually dying into ether as they neared the delicate opal-green of the horizon. The Thames, not a volume of yellowish-grey mud, but the Thames of Turner, broke under the arches of the bridge into a thousand burning, diamond-coloured flakes of light. Every barge-sail or steamer-funnel on the river glowed rosy-red; every squalid house and wall along the quays had received some subtle hue of violet or of amber to transmute its ugliness. Mast and cupola, dome and spire, river and wharf—the alchemy of sunset touched them all alike into beauty. And high above, for once not a heavy mass of smoke-coloured lead, rose St. Paul's; in Archie's sight a heaven-tinted dome bearing aloft the cross, a golden promise, a light, a hope to all the toiling restless city at its foot.

Her heart beat as though with a new life. She had heard from Bettina that London was hideous, foggy, wicked; she saw it a majestic city, a dream of golden sky and river, grand bridge, and stately wharf, and heaven-tinted dome. What must existence be here! What noble lives must not men and women lead in such a place, compared to the lives they led in poor little towns like Morteville! How she hoped there

would be time for her to see one London street—ah, yes, one would suffice; with its brilliancy, and riches, and crowds of city-dressed people—before she had to start upon her journey home. In a sort of ecstasy she pressed her hand on Gerald's arm as they were standing on the deck, and made known this desire to him in a whisper. Cheapside, or Piccadilly, or Oxford Street, she said; mentioning the few London names she knew. Anywhere would do; but she would give all she possessed (two francs and a-half—poor Archie!—and the door-key) to see one street, with the shops gas-lit, before she left.

The request, and the hand-pressure, and the up-turned glance from the mignonne face, sent the blood to Gerald's heart. A stronger man than he was, might, perhaps, have lost his coolness a little at such an hour, and alone with such a companion as Archie; and he stooped and whispered a few very sweet, very mad, words into the girl's ear; words not absolutely disloyal as yet, not more disloyal than those he had already spoken when they stood together on the terrace by the sea at Morteville; but words such as Lucia Durant, could she have heard them, would for very certain not have approved.

Before Archie could answer, before she could even think how much or how little Gerald's answer meant, the steamer had stopped. At once a hoarse Babel of sounds—foreign sounds they seemed to her—greeted them from the wharf; the pent-up tide of excursionists, all eager to land, and untroubled by luggage, bore them resistlessly on towards the crowded narrow gangway, and in another minute Archie Lovell's feet, for the first time in her life, rested upon English ground.

CHAPTER XV.

Mr. Durant's Generosity.

"AND I have got the old lady's cloak on still, Mr. Durant! What, in heaven's name, am I to do with it?" Gerald and Miss Lovell had been driven from the Thames pier to the London Bridge station, and were now waiting until a sublimely-indifferent clerk would condescend to give them information about the tidal train to Folkestone. "She told me, as we came up the river, I might wear it till we got to London; and then in the hurry of landing I forgot all about her and her cloak and everything else. What ought I to do with it?"

"Keep it, if it is worth anything; leave it in the waiting-room, if it is not," said Gerald, unhesitatingly. "I wonder, Miss Lovell, that you should ask any questions on such a point."

"Well, it really is old — old! and washed and mended," said Archie, falling at once into Gerald's easy morality, "so it can't matter much to the owner whether it's lost or not. I'll just keep it on for the present, and then, if I find it too warm, leave it behind me somewhere. I would never like the prince or M. Gounod, or any of my partners, to see me land on the Morteville pier in it." Only this last part of the remark Miss Lovell made to herself, not aloud.

The sublimely-indifferent clerk now imparted to them that the tidal train for Folkestone left at half-past

ten; in rather more than two hours, that was to say, from the present time. "And I can wait very well alone here at the station," said Archie, a little shyly; "and it is really time for us to say good-bye. Mr. Durant, I have given you so much trouble, and I am so much obliged to you for your kindness!" They had only talked common-places since that last whisper of Gerald's on board the steamer, and the girl turned her eyes away from him as she spoke.

"Would you rather be without me, Miss Wilson? Say so, and I will go away at once."

"I don't want to trouble you, Mr. Durant. I think you must have had quite enough of me without waiting any longer here."

"And if I have not had enough of you? If I want exceedingly to stay and be of some use to you to the last?"

She smiled, holding down her face still, and Gerald, instead of going away, told his valet, who, observant and mystified, was waiting a few yards from where they stood, to get a cab and take his luggage home at once.

"Without you, sir?"

"Without me. I shan't be home till late. I am going to spend the evening at Mr. Dennison's in the Temple, most likely."

After which Mr. Bennett went off, thankful, whatever happened, that he had at length got the luggage fairly in his own hands, and so could not by possibility be taken back to Morteville—a contingency he had several times speculated on as quite in the power of his master's companion to effect—and Mr. Durant and Archie were alone.

"Do I look mad, or foreign, or what?" she whispered, coming up close to Gerald's side. "These English people all stare at me so strangely as they go by."

Her face was flushed with excitement; her sailor's hat, as the wind had left it, a little on one side; her long hair hanging over her neck and shoulders; and this disarray, and her singular beauty, added perhaps to the fact of her being dressed in white muslin and a scarlet cloak, undoubtedly made her look different to the female British traveller ordinarily to be met with at this hour of the night at London stations.

"Perhaps if we were to go to the waiting-room," suggested Gerald, "you would like to have tea or coffee, or something, and while they are getting it, you might——"

"Make myself look human," interrupted Archie. "All right, only you need not have hesitated. The faces of the people as they go by tell me plainly enough the kind of monster they think me." And then she took Gerald's arm and tripped off with him down the long-echoing passage that they were told led to the refreshment-room. Tripped with feet that seemed to tread on air, so happy was she. The voyage had been delightful enough, but these breathless after-adventures were better still; these crowds of strangers, this foreign tongue—for to hear English spoken about her was foreign to Archie; above all, the sense of being in London, and alone, without Bettina, without her father! Once, years ago, in Florence, she had got out upon the roof of the six-storied house where they lodged, and gazed with intoxicated, wondrous delight upon the altered world at her feet. Something of the same de-

licious giddiness, the same sense of wrong-doing and danger, and intense excitement, all blent into one, was upon her now. Of coming to positive harm—harm from which all her future life should never thoroughly free her—she had no more fear than she had, as a child, of falling down and being killed upon the Florence pavement.

In the refreshment-room a young person with an eighteen-inch waist, and shining black hair, *à l'imperatrice*, received with supreme composure Gerald's modest command of tea for two, and then, more than ever ashamed of herself from a certain expression she had read in the superb young person's eyes, Miss Lovell found her way to the ladies' waiting-room. The typical occupants of ladies' waiting-rooms were there. A fierce old maid, sitting bolt upright by the table, guarding eleven packages and a bird-cage, all of which she tried with a glare to clutch every time any one looked at her; a farmer's daughter, on her way from Somerset to a situation in Kent, who asked imbecile questions, and jumped up, with her face on fire, every time she heard a door open or a bell ring; a stout lady, maternally occupied with a stout infant in a corner; and a thin lady with six children, out of temper, two nurses, a baby, bottles, food, toys, and children's luggage of all kinds, filling up the remaining portions of the room. Every woman and child present stared up with open eyes at Archie; the old maid by the table clutched her parcels tight, and shook her head meaningly at the thin lady, as much as to say, "You see I was right, madam. No knowing what sort of characters you may meet when you travel."

"Dressing-room to the right," cried an austere per-

sonage, the presiding official of the place, who was sitting, with her hands before her, on the only comfortable chair the room afforded; and into the dressing-room Miss Lovell, more and more ashamed of herself, fled for refuge. There was a light from a gas-burner about twenty feet high, and a tall, dim looking-glass, and some very dark-complexioned water; no towels, no soap: can railway companies be expected to care how ladies wash their carnal hands?—but provision for the spirit in the shape of large printed texts on placards round the walls; a bible and prayer-book on a little deal table; also a missionary box. Miss Lovell dipped her face into water, and dried it on Mr. Durant's fine lawn handkerchief, which she happened to have left in the pocket of the cloak; pinned all her rebellious locks as tight and smooth as they would lie around her head; put her sailor's hat on straight, arranged the old red cloak decorously, and pulled down her blue gauze veil close over her face.

As she walked demurely back in this improved condition, she had the satisfaction of finding that the people stared at her somewhat less. "Which shows that it was nothing but my hair that made me look 'odd!'" she remarked, seating herself opposite to Gerald, after ridding herself of her cloak and hat like a child, and tossing them down on a chair. "It's all very well to follow papa's picturesque tastes in Morteville, but directly I come to England—I mean, if I ever come here—I shall take very good care to look like other people. Now, I wonder," abruptly, "what your cousin Lucia would have thought if she had seen me a few minutes ago?"

The mere suggestion made Gerald wince. What

would Lucia—what would any one who knew Lucia—think of his companion at this moment? She was looking prettier than ever; her face aglow from its recent bath; her bright wet hair negligently coiled round her head; her little brown hands clasped together on the table, as she leaned forward to speak to him; her blue eyes all alight with animation as they looked full into his. Born and bred in Italy, this girl had in her very nature something of the joyous careless abandonment of the women of the south. Her voice was musical always, but she spoke out—I will not say loud—as Englishwomen of pure race do not; she gesticulated, ever so little, as she talked; when she laughed, she laughed with free expansion of the chest; with fullest showing of the white teeth. In the drawing-room of a duchess Archie in an instant might have taken her stand as what she was: an English girl, gentle by birth, but with some subtle inoculation of southern eagerness and passion in her veins, and a want of manner so thorough as to be the very perfection of that which all artificial manner aims at—simplicity. But the waiting-room of the South Eastern terminus is not the drawing-room of a duchess; and whether her hair hung down loosely over her shoulders, or was coiled in this bright broad coronet above her face, looks of admiration, a great deal too coarse for Gerald's taste to brook, continued to be cast on poor Archie from every pair of male eyes that approached her.

"The English people are the worst-bred in the world," he remarked; so pointedly that a good old papa of fifty at a neighbouring table, who had been staring at them uninterruptedly for five minutes, immediately sank his head abashed into his newspaper.

"Foreigners live in public, and are accustomed to it from the time they are six years old. The true Briton, when he does leave his den, stares about him as if he was at a wild-beast show. Now that we are going to eat," he added, laughing, for the girl began to look distressed in earnest, "we shall probably be found more interesting still. There is something peculiarly grateful to the citizen mind in watching curious animals feed. You will have something to eat with your coffee?" Doubtfully this, for it was not three hours since they had dined, and Gerald was ignorant as to how many meals a schoolgirl's appetite could require a day.

"Please. Nothing solid, though. Bread and butter, or brioche, or some fruit."

The superb young person signified, with dignity, that bread and butter, brioche, and fruit, were things unknown to her. There were the refreshments that they saw upon the counter; fossilized sausage-rolls, battered old sandwiches, lava-hued buns strewn over with a cinderish deposit of currants, and packages of Wotherspoon's lozenges; and from these refreshments they could choose.

"Bring some buns, then," said Gerald, pointing out what appeared to him the least horrible object present; and buns were brought, and eaten by Archie—Mr. Durant looking on in silent wonder and admiration; and then the tea—very hot and very unlike tea—was drunk; and Archie began to put on her gloves; and their talk went round again to what they would do with the hour and a quarter they still had to spare.

"There would be no time, of course, to see any-

thing?" said the girl; but her voice made it a question. "I mean anything of the London streets and shops?"

"Well, I don't see why not," Gerald answered, taking out his watch, either because he wanted really to know the time, or because he did not care just then to meet the full gaze of Archie's eyes. "These hansom fellows go so quick, I think, if we were to take one, we might have time to get to the West End and back. Piccadilly, was it not, Miss Wilson, that you wished to see?"

"Oh yes, Piccadilly, or anywhere else," said Archie, to whom the words West End, Piccadilly, or hansom, all conveyed about the same meaning. "You know, of course, how much time we shall have. I'll do just as you think best."

"You will, Miss Wilson?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then let us go." And they rose; and while Gerald went to pay for the tea, Archie remained before a glass that hung close beside the table, putting on her hat and arranging her collar, and smoothing back her hair—with all the little well-contented gestures that come so naturally to a pretty girl before a looking-glass—and thinking how pleasant this drive by gas-light would be, and how sorry—with a great pang this!—how sorry she would be to part from Gerald at the end of it all. To part: to return to Morteville: and for him to go away and marry his cousin Lucia, and never think of her again while he lived!

When she got as far as this in her reflections, a mist swam before Miss Lovell's eyes. She brushed her hand before them hastily, for she had a child's shame of tears yet, as well as a child's facility in shedding

them; and then, looking up into the glass again, she saw not only her own face reflected there, but a man's—and a man's she knew.

The vision came upon her so quickly that instead of turning round at once, she continued for a full minute to gaze, spell-bound like one in a dream, into the glass. Where had she known that face? In what country, at what time of her life, had those rough features, that gentle kindly expression, been so familiar to her? If her father's face had suddenly appeared above her shoulder, it could scarce have seemed more home-like than did this one; and still she could recall no name to which it belonged. It was an English face; and what Englishman had she ever known intimately in her life? She was on the point of turning round when the stranger, whoever he was, moved away abruptly; and when she did turn, three or four men were walking near her in different directions. Which of these could have been he who stood and looked at her? She had not the slightest clue by which to divine. One of the men was in a grey overcoat, the rest were in dark clothes. This was all she could tell about them; all probably that she would ever know about her vision. It must have been a chance likeness only that had startled her, she thought; a likeness most probably to some German or Italian friend of her father's, who had held her on his knee when she was a child, and the remembrance of whose face had slumbered in her memory till now. What a coward she must be that her heart should beat so quickly, the colour all die out of her cheek—she had watched it do so in the glass—for such an accident!

But accident or coincidence, whichever it was, the

vision had wrought a singular and utter revulsion in Archie's feelings. The expression of that face she had seen was grave and pitying; and instinctively she thought of it, brought her father before her and made her stop short, and reflect upon what all this was that she was doing. For the first time since she got clear of the Calais pier, she felt frightened, and wished she was at home. Bettina had often told her that men were wicked and designing—good-looking, fashionable men the worst of all. How could she know that Mr. Durant was not desperately wicked, in spite of his handsome face and pleading voice? Suppose she went away for this drive with him, and he did not bring her back in time, and she missed the train, and never reached Morteville next morning, and when her father and Bettina came back they would find Jeanneton crying under the porte-cocher, and the door locked, and herself, Archie, gone. At this dreadful picture her lips quivered, a choking feeling rose in her throat, and when Gerald came back and offered her his arm, she was too agitated and too afraid to trust her own voice to speak. So, interpreting her altered manner in the way most flattering to himself, he led her away through the station, whispering a few encouraging words as they went, and pressing ever so slightly the little hand that he could feel was trembling nervously as it rested on his arm.

When they were outside he bade her wait one moment while he ran to hail a cab from the stand, about twenty or thirty yards distant, and then Miss Lovell spoke. "Please don't get a cab for me, Mr. Durant, I would rather not go, if you don't mind. I would rather wait here."

From any other woman Gerald would have expected this change of mind, and have argued the point. From Archie he knew that it was earnest, not a feint; and he remained dead silent. "I hope you won't think me silly to turn about so," she entreated him softly, "but when you were gone I began to recollect—about papa, you understand, and getting home—and I thought how dreadful it would be if I missed the train. Now, you are not cross with me?"

"Miss Wilson," he remarked, drily, "tell the whole truth. You are afraid to trust yourself with me."

Her hand shifted uneasily on his arm. "I'm not afraid, Mr. Durant, but—I don't know whether I ought. Now, I just ask you—supposing it wasn't you and me at all, do you think I ought?"

"To do what?"

"To drive about with you, and—and run the chance of losing the train."

"There need be no chance of losing it," he answered, promptly. "The question is, would you rather have an hour's drive through the cool streets, or remain in a suffocating waiting-room here?"

"Well, then, you decide for me, please!" She wanted desperately to see the shop-windows, and she felt how ungrateful it was, after all his kindness, to put so little trust in him. "If you promise me to be back in good time for the train——"

"If I promise to do all that you wish, now and for ever, Miss Wilson, will you come?"

An unwonted tremour was in his voice, and Archie Lovell's heart vibrated to it. In love with him she was not, had never been; save, perhaps, for that

second's space upon the terrace at Morteville; but she liked him, she admired him—shall I be understood if I say that she pitied him? She felt for him, in spite of his eight years' seniority, something as an elder sister might feel for a brother whom she loves, but cannot thoroughly believe in; and standing here, alone with him now, her cheeks flushed crimson with shame, to feel—even while her heart thrilled to his words—how scanty was the trust she put in him, or in his promises. And this very distrust had well-nigh hurried Archie into trusting him! It seemed so cruel to hold back from him now; during the last short hour they would be together, to deny him in anything he asked of her.

"I don't know about obeying me for ever, Mr. Durant," and Gerald detected in a moment that her voice was not thoroughly steady. "There won't be much opportunity after to-night for you to obey or disobey me; but now, if you really are sure——"

The words died on Archie Lovell's lips; she drew her hand with a start from Gerald's arm. So close that he almost touched her as he passed, a man went quickly by them in the gaslight; a tall, large-built man, in a grey overcoat, and with a certain square-set about the head and shoulders that convinced Archie, although she saw no feature of his face, it was the same man who had looked across her shoulder into the glass. The same mysterious influence he had exercised upon her then, returned, only with double, treble strength, across her mind. She would *not* go away with Mr. Durant: she would wait here for the train that should take her back safely to her father and Bettina.

"Are you frightened, Miss Wilson? Did that fellow touch you as he passed? or do you know him, or what?"

Archie's eyes, wide open, continued to follow the stranger until he was out of sight, and then, and not till then, she spoke. "I'm not frightened, Mr. Durant, but startled. That man is some one I have known—I am certain of it—and I can't help fancying that he recognised me——"

"Oh, not at all likely," interrupted Gerald lightly, "and if it were so, what matter? Now stay one moment here, while I cross the road and hail a cab."

Instead of arguing any more, Archie diplomatically stole her hand again within his arm. "Mr. Durant," she said, softly, "why should we waste the time by driving, after all? It's the last time we shall ever be together. Yes, the truth must be spoken at length, and we shall be far better able to talk here than rattling over the streets of London in a fiacre. Take me for a walk over the great bridge there, and I shall like it better alone with you, than being shown all the fine streets and shops in the world."

She held her face beseechingly up to his; her voice came trembling, as it always did when she was moved; and with some faint accent, some intonation rather, of Italian clinging to its sound. And then this change of mind was, by her Machiavellian instinctive art, rendered in itself so gracious, so sweet, to Gerald's vanity! He felt he could not but concede to her all she wished; nay, he could not but acknowledge that she was too generous, too true, to be led into further folly. Corrupt Gerald Durant was not, nor cynical—although

his easy nature led him into actions savouring of corruption, and of cynicism on occasions. What he most admired—consequently what he was himself good enough to recognise—in Archie, was her exceeding honesty, her untaught loyal frankness. And, call it epicureanism or virtue, he did at this moment feel that it was well that she should leave him thus; well that he should be able to hang one unsullied portrait among the gallery of the women he had loved!

On the brink of every action—high or low, base or noble—Gerald Durant could be ever swerved aside by some sudden turn of sentiment like this. Sentimental, in reality, rather than passionate in love, it was in love-affairs, above all, that he was most prone to waver. A coarse, selfish nature like Robert Dennison's, walks straight to its immediate gratification; a refined selfish nature, like Gerald's, hesitates, stops short; speculates whether occasionally a higher pleasure may not be found in abnegation! And though such men have not the materials in them for great heroes or for good lovers, their very weakness, somehow, makes them intensely lovable to people stronger than themselves; and when, now and then, they do come to grief (and bring you to grief with them), you feel the whole guilt must, of necessity, belong to you, not them; which, for the sake of their consciences, is charming.

An accident, or Archie's uncompromising honesty, had saved them both; and already Gerald's imagination was moved by the thought of his own generosity; by the thought, too, that Archie would be always Archie—fair, pure, unsullied—in his recollection. Ten minutes ago, with the girl's blue eyes upraised to his,

he had desired, as strongly as he ever desired anything in his life, to take her with him for that drive through London. The picturesqueness of the situation fired his fancy!—driving with this little half-foreign girl, in her sailor's hat and white dress, along the streets of London in a hansom; listening to her childish talk about all she saw; holding her hand furtively in his, probably; and watching the changed look on her face when he began to tell her at last how much he cared for her. No; at this point the picturesque situation became commonplace, and he had not fully thought it out.

Only, if a darkened life, if ruin, if despair, had chanced to ensue in after-times, Gerald would have looked back, and firmly believed, and made every one else believe with him, that he meant no wrong!

Circumstances, picturesque circumstances, had been too strong for him: just that.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Bridge of Sighs.

ARCHIE put her hand within his arm and drew him a step towards her, or, as she meant it to be, towards London Bridge. That step was the first one in the direction of salvation.

"It will be better than seeing shop-windows and streets," she said, repeating her last words. "I can imagine the London streets—I have driven through Amiens by gaslight—but I can't imagine what it is to stand at night upon a mighty bridge like that. Thank you," for he was walking obediently by her side now. "Mr. Durant, how shall I ever thank you for all the kindness you have shown to me to-day?"

"You won't thank me in the only way I want, Miss Wilson. I don't care for any other."

"In what way shall I thank you, then? Tell me—I will do it."

"No, you will not. You cannot. The thing is over, impossible. You will go back to Morteville, marry your Russian prince, perhaps, and I—Miss Wilson," he interrupted himself, "I hope that you will write to me sometimes? Write and tell me you got to the end of your journey safely, at all events."

"I will send you a newspaper, Mr. Durant"—Gerald had already found some excuse for giving her his address—"just to let you know I am safe; but as to writing——"

"As to writing?"

"No; it would be better not. When we have said 'Good-bye,' we have said it. Our lives lie apart."

"Miss Wilson—Archie, what a cruel speech!"

"A true one," she answered, quietly. "My father is a poor man, Mr. Durant. A man—why should I mind telling you?—living a little under a cloud, poor papa! and we write to no one. I don't know whether we shall live in Morteville any longer, or where we shall go even when we leave; and papa and Bettina might not find it convenient that I should be writing about, giving our address. Now, you are not angry with me for refusing?"

"No, Miss Wilson; I succumb to it as a necessity. It would be against every natural law that I should hear from you. Lawyers, duns, cousins, are the human beings who always remember to write. The people one cares for, never! You will remember me a month, if you are not amused, Archie; two days, if you are."

The word "Archie" had fallen from his lips so naturally that Miss Lovell felt it would have been absurd, affected, for him not to use it. "Amused or not amused, I shall remember you," she said, simply. "I shall remember you while I live."

"And some day come to remember me with contempt probably," said Gerald. "I fancy most people do that when they think my character over."

Archie was silent.

"You don't contradict me?" he persisted. "Some day, when you look back on all this as a thing of the past, you will remember me with contempt."

"With contempt, never!"

"With what feeling, then?"

"I don't know, Mr. Durant. What is the use of my trying to look forward to what I shall think when I am old and wise? I am foolish now, and—and I don't think of you with contempt. Where is the good of looking forward?"

Now the preceding little questions and answers had not been spoken uninterruptedly, as I have written them, but with such hiatuses and dislocations as must be inevitable in the speech of any two persons who should attempt to whisper soft nothings amidst a crowd of some thousands of London excursionists. One of those cheap trains to which by bitter irony the name of pleasure is prefixed, had just disgorged itself at the South Eastern terminus, and a stream of human beings, the men beer-sustained but dreadfully depressed with baby-carrying, the women loudly miserable, the children wailing from overmuch gingerbread and want of sleep, were jostling Archie and Mr. Durant at every step they took. At the moment they were about to cross the bridge three or four young men, not drunk exactly, but nearer drunk than sober, pressed up behind them with some of the remarks that to persons of their class pass current for humour respecting Archie's scarlet cloak and Gerald's hat. He had travelled in that same Tyrolese hat that he wore on the day when Archie first met him, and which was certainly not of a shape you see in London streets, save in connection with monkeys and white mice. Miss Lovell, her presence of mind forsaking her, dropped Gerald's arm, and in a second she felt herself lost! Lost in a coarse hot mob, and with three or four insolent faces—for the young men kept their attention on her still—peering under her

hat and making remarks (happily lost upon her, being in slang) as to her dress and her pretty face, and "the Frenchman's"—Gerald's—want of pluck in not taking better care of her.

She was intensely, sickeningly frightened; and gave a sort of little cry—holding her hands up, as if to beg her assailants to spare her—with a word or two of Italian bursting from her in her terror. At the sound of the foreign tongue their amusement redoubled, and one, the biggest and most insolent-looking of the group, was just pushing his face into horrible closeness with Archie's, when he received the most summary check to his admiration conceivable: a blow straight between the eyes, that sent him staggering back into one of his companions' arms; also, from the circumstance of Gerald wearing a signet ring upon the little finger of his right hand, giving him a mark for life just above the bridge of his short nose. In a second, at this unexpected show of fight from "the Frenchman," every sign of a regular street-row arose.

Before Gerald could strike out again, two stout mechanics' wives, who had seen nothing whatever of the affair, were clinging on, shrieking, to each of his arms; his hat, which had fallen off in the rush he made to save Archie, was being pitched hither and thither, with shouts of derision in the crowd, and cries of "Shame, shame!" began to make themselves heard as his antagonist's face, deadly white, and covered with blood, rose up and glared vengefully about in the gas-light.

At this moment, luckily for the patricians in the affray, a couple of policemen appeared on the scene, with three or four more following rapidly, within thirty

yards. As a matter of course, the man with a broken nose was collared first; for policemen, being only human, have more faith in their own eyes than in any other kind of evidence.

"It wasn't me at all!" he cried, as well as he could speak. "It was the other fellow struck me, savage, in the face."

The policeman asked who? One man, who had seen, answered "The Frenchman;" and immediately the crowd—who had not seen—vociferated "The Frenchman, the Frenchman!"

"Where is he? Point him out."

But now the crowd was a little at fault. Gerald, in a Tyrolese hat, might look unlike an Englishman; but Gerald's smooth face, without a hat at all, looked less like a Frenchman's than any man's in the crowd.

"There's the young woman as was with him!" cried a voice. "Her in the scarlet cloak and round hat."

The poor young woman in the scarlet cloak, upon this, found herself the object of attention to hundreds of eager, dirty faces, and with both of the policemen asking her for information. Which was the Frenchman?

Much too frightened to say she did not know, Archie pointed vaguely to one of her late tormentors, a young man who happened to wear a tuft of black hair upon his chin, and gasped out:—

"He began it all—indeed, he did! This one," showing the man with the broken nose, "was not as bad. The other began it."

This was something tangible and conclusive, and gave the clue at once as to what every one had seen.

The stout females who had been clinging to Gerald dropped him now, as an obscure person of no interest, and pressed forward to furnish each her quota of evidence.

"I seen the blow struck myself, sir, by this here young man with the beard, and the other man fell back, and—"

"Move on," cried one of the policemen authoritatively, as soon as he saw which two out of the mob were his men, and the rest of the force having now come up; and on the crowd was moved; the injured man in front, the supposed Frenchman tightly collared in the rear, and vainly protesting against the illegality of his capture.

Gerald, with a sign of his hand, made Archie comprehend that she should stand passively where she was and wait for him. She did so, and not until the crowd had thoroughly broken and dispersed did he return to her side.

"I'm not a bit frightened!" she cried, seizing hold of him, half-crying, half-laughing, and trembling in every limb. "Not a bit. Mr. Durant, how you saved me, and how brave you were!"

"In letting another fellow be taken up for my work?" he asked.

"No, no; in coming as you did to my help. That horrible man was putting his face close—close to mine! and I felt myself getting sick and blind with fright, and then your arm struck out before me, and I was saved!"

And she clung to him.

"And I, but for you, would have finished the evening at a police-station," said Gerald. "In spite of my

reason I still retain the instincts of an English school-boy, and never can help hitting out on these sorts of occasions; but it is the instinct of a fool! Only for your presence of mind I should have been carried off to the nearest lock-up house, and you would have been left here, among a London crowd, alone."

Archie trembled more than ever at the thought.

"But I don't know what presence of mind I showed, Mr. Durant. How did I save you being carried off by the police?"

Gerald explained to her; and Archie felt a Quixotic impulse to rush after the crowd, tell the policeman the truth, and cause the wrong man to be freed. Then she wondered whether Gerald was right in letting the mistake go on; even to this miserable, unknown shop-boy, was it upright, loyal? and then she remembered he had done it for her sake, and clung to him again. Every question was solved by Archie at this time of her life by impulse, not principle; and the first intuitions of that fine nature were ever right. Only, like a child, when she saw that the people she liked felt differently to herself, she went over, without a struggle, to their side.

"I did not tell a story intentionally, at all events," she remarked, after a few minutes' thought. "And the man with the beard did begin—teasing me, I mean, and I hope he will be well frightened, but not put in prison, for his punishment. Mr. Durant, look at your coat!" One of the sides of Gerald's coat was torn across from the collar to the arm. "And your hat—where is it? Great heavens, what can we look like?"

Unlike other people, most incontestibly. Archie in the costume you know of; Gerald, with his torn coat,

and hatless. A policeman, one of those who had come up at the conclusion of the row, walked by just at this moment, turned, and scrutinized them narrowly. They were standing close under a lamp, and he could see both of their faces as clear as if it had been noonday.

"Luckily for me, Miss Wilson, that the night is so hot," said Gerald, speaking with intentional distinctness. He had a mortal dread, for Archie's sake, of being implicated still in the affray. "When those people were killing each other, some ruffian knocked my hat off, and the last I saw of it was making a somersault in the air over the bridge. If you really want to go further we must be making haste," he added, taking out his watch. "Our train starts at half-past ten, and it is nearly ten already."

And then X 22 moved on—whatever suspicions he may have entertained of these "foreign-looking customers" set at rest; and with the face, and voice, and trick of manner of one of them at least, graven upon his professional memory for life.

They walked slowly on to the middle of the bridge, and soon, in her wonder and delight at what she saw, the excitement of the adventure faded from Archie Lovell's mind. She was keenly susceptible, as few girls of her age—as few women of any age—are, to emotions derived simply from without, and unconnected with personal or petty interests. Lucia would have talked for hours about the torn coat and lost hat, and all that she had gone through, and all that everybody would say when they heard of her courage. Archie forgot the adventure, and her companion, and herself, in the bewilderment of new and vivid feelings which the sight of London awakened in her. Some dim sense

of the pathos, the mystery, of this "mighty heart," broke, child as she was, across her intelligence, and held her lips silent, and suffused her eyes with tears. It was starlight now, and dome and spire, and distant minster, lifted their shadowy shapes, of delicate silver-grey against the purple arch of sky; along the river-side the quiver of innumerable lamps showed forth in fitful relief the gloomy outlines of the wharves and houses; a chaos of reflection was painted blood-red and luminous upon the inky "highway of the world" beneath. As Archie stood and gazed around her she felt a sudden realization of what life is; life with all its limitless powers of suffering and of happiness. Ah, what sorrow, she felt, what sorrow, what love, what patient endurance, what tragic passions of all kinds, must be stirring in these millions of human hearts amidst which she stood, a foolish girl who had never suffered, never loved, never lived, save in play! Her breath came quickly; she dropped her companion's arm, leant her breast against the cold stone parapet of the bridge, and sighed; a vague yearning for life, and all that life unfolds, even its misery, stirring her heart as with an actual pain.

"You sigh, Miss Wilson," said Gerald. "You are tired out at last. Take my arm and let us turn back to the station. There isn't very much to be seen here after all, is there?"

"I beg your pardon," she cried, with a start. "I—I don't think I could have heard you right."

He repeated his words, and Archie was shocked at their common-place sound. "Not much to see! How can there be more? I never saw anything so great before in my life."

"No? Did you never see any large cities by gas-light in Italy?"

"Yes; but I was a child then, and English people did not live in them. I feel here"—her voice faltering with one of its subtle, wonderful inflections—"as if I had brothers and sisters for the first time in my life."

Mr. Durant smiled at her eagerness. "You should see Paris on a fête-day if you are so fond of lamplight effects. You wouldn't think much of London, if you had seen the Champs Elysées and the Tuileries illuminated."

After which Archie spoke no more to him of what she felt. With her father she could have lingered here, she felt, for hours; interchanging ever and anon a quaint fancy, or hazarding a wild suggestion, as their custom was together. From Gerald she felt that she was very far apart. He could dance with her, laugh with her, sentimentalize with her. At this moment, when noble longings, fresh enthusiasm, stirred her heart, Mr. Durant stood in a different world to hers.

She took his arm as he told her, and they went on, at her wish, to the farther end of the bridge, then crossed, so as to have a different view of the city on their way back. The pavement was not so densely crowded here; and as they walked slowly along, Archie happened to notice a woman's figure crouched away in a corner of one of the recesses, and with her head sunk down against the wall at her side. "Look, Mr. Durant," she whispered, "is that woman ill? See the way she crouches there, in that thin dress, and with nothing round her. Let me speak to her."

"Good God, no, Miss Wilson!" exclaimed Gerald,

quickly. "We are not in Morteville, remember. No one ever speaks to people in London."

"Not if they are ill?"

"Oh, she is not ill. No one ever is ill. Let us come on, please."

But Archie held obstinately back. "I am sure that woman is ill—I know it from the look of her hands—do you think I've seen no sick people abroad, ever? Ill, and in that dress, poor soul! Mr. Durant, do you think it would be dishonest for me to give her this cloak? I really want to get rid of it—it's so hot, and it would never do for me to land in Morteville in things that don't belong to me."

"Then please leave it at the station, or throw it, if you prefer, into the Thames. You *cannot*, really, speak to people of this kind." And he drew her on, sorely against her will, for four or five steps.

But then Archie made a resolute stop, and with a quick movement unhooked her cloak and transferred it from her shoulder to her arm. "Mr. Durant, please, I would rather give it to her. Is it because you think it dishonest you won't let me?"

"Certainly not. The cloak, to begin with, is worth nothing, and you can never get it back to its rightful owner. It is—Miss Wilson, I cannot tell you why you must not do these charitable things in London. Pray be guided by me. It would never do for you to speak to people of that sort."

"People of what sort?"

He hesitated. "People who go to sleep in the recesses on London Bridge."

"Miserable people, in short?"

"Yes, that is one way of putting it. The woman

—well, not to speak sentimentally, the woman is most probably ‘overtaken’—only you don’t know what that is—and will no doubt be in the kindly charge of the police before very long.”

“But my speaking to her wouldn’t make me be ‘overtaken,’” persisted Archie; bringing out this unconscious condensation of all Christian charity, with the quiet pertinacity that was peculiar to her. “Come, Mr. Durant, you are not very much in earnest about it. I can tell by your face you don’t mind letting me have my own way!”

Any persistent human being, right or wrong, could have his way with Gerald; and Archie in another minute had turned, and was bending over the sunken figure in the recess. Gerald stood three or four yards from her, no nearer. His nature shrank from everything sick or miserable or repulsive. He would give other people who asked it of him, money for such objects, if he happened to have money in his pocket. To go near them, to look, voluntarily, at ugliness; to touch a squalid hand; feel the impure breath of lost lips like these, were duties that did not at all lie within the scope of his philosophy.

Miss Lovell bent over the poor unconscious wretch, and spoke to her; spoke with the honeyed sweetness of true womanly compassion; and the girl raised her head a little and silently stared at her. Her figure was turned away from the pavement, so that Gerald could only catch an outline of her face in profile, but Miss Lovell could see it full. It was a fine face, she thought; haggard and full of misery, but with a pale pure skin, and handsome, clear-cut features. What horrible accident, she marvelled, could have brought a girl, scarce

older than herself, to be abroad alone at this hour, and in such a place!

"You must be chill, sitting here. Will you take this cloak, please? I don't want it—I should be glad for you to take it, dear."

Still no answer; only when Archie had put the cloak round her shoulders—herself stooping to fasten it—the girl's lips parted, and in a strange, hoarse voice, a voice from whence the very ghost of youth and womanhood seemed flown, tried to thank her.

Archie drew ever so little away at the sound. "Can I do anything more for you?" she said. "You'll be warmer now, I think, but I would like to do something more for you before I go."

But the woman made no answer; only with a sort of groan sank her head down low between her hands: perhaps the two or three mechanical syllables she had uttered had exhausted the last of human speech, of human consciousness, that was left to her: and Archie, with a disappointed conviction that Mr. Durant's way of viewing the matter had been, at least, a practical one, returned to his side.

She saw to her surprise that there was a troubled, softened expression upon his face. "Mr. Durant, how grave you look," she whispered. "Are you really annoyed with me still for my obstinacy? I don't think I have done either harm or good. The poor creature seems to be beyond feeling want or hunger, or any other pain now."

Instead of replying at once, Gerald stood and continued to gaze with a sort of fascination at the crouching figure, whose face was now entirely hid from him again. He had seen one turn of the profile, and

Maggie Hall's face in a moment had come before him. Maggie! why the very thought of her being here was monstrous. Robert's wife, wherever she was, must be living at least in common comfort; and this was a miserable outcast of the London streets! He did not walk up to the woman's side, bid her raise her face, and so put doubt at an end at once, because want, and disease, and squalid vice, were, as you know, intensely repugnant to him; and Gerald Durant never voluntarily made a movement in the direction of any distasteful duty. He continued to watch her only; vaguely remembering the fresh-faced girl he used to meet among the lanes at Heathcotes; and a pitying, sentimental regret crossed his heart as he marvelled how this lost wretch could, in the depths to which she had fallen, wear the print of beauty like poor Maggie's still! And then—then he did what was much more congenial to him than thinking of unpleasant subjects, or unhappy people of any kind: felt the touch of Archie's hand upon his arm again, and turned away with a laugh—a laugh, and one of the childish jests they were accustomed to have together, in the direction of the station.

God knows if the wanderer heard and recognised his voice! To this hour Gerald Durant looks back with a feeling of remorse to the possibility. Not that the responsibility of anything that happened that night burthens his conscience. Because he saw, or fancied he saw, a chance likeness to Maggie in this stranger's face was no reason he should have gone up and spoken to her. He made it a rule never to interfere in any painful circumstances whatsoever; and really the whole affair, from first to last, concerned him not. It is not

this. It is the cruelty—let me use the right word—it is the ill-breeding of having jested in the hearing of a dying woman that haunts him!

Just as they were starting on their way again the city clocks struck the quarter past ten; and Gerald told Miss Lovell that they must walk on quick. "We have been trying to say good-bye for nine hours!" he remarked; "but it is none the less hard to say now that the time for parting has come in earnest. In ten minutes more I shall be standing alone, looking after the train that takes you from me. I deserved nothing better, Archie," he added, tenderly. "I don't complain. I'm not selfish enough to wish your life to be mixed up, in any way, with such a life as mine!"

At which confession the tears rushed hotly into Miss Lovell's eyes, and her hand rested more heavily than it had done before, upon his arm. A woman never knows, perhaps, how much she *might* have liked a man, until she hears definitely that he is nobly prepared to relinquish her.

They had not much more opportunity for conversation of any kind now. The station was one dense crowd of night-mail passengers, porters, and luggage, on their arrival, and Gerald had only just time to get Miss Lovell's ticket and hurry her away into the train before the second bell rang.

"You are all right, now," he said, standing upon the step of the carriage as he spoke, and holding her hand in his. "You won't forget to write—no, to send the newspaper—telling me that you got home safe?"

"And—and, Mr. Durant," she whispered, "how much money do I owe you, please? Forty-two shillings

and a sixpence, is it not? Yes, I am sure it is. I have counted every time you paid anything for me. I will send it as soon as I know of any one going to London."

"And make me feel you never want to have anything more to do with me," said Gerald. "Wait for all reckoning up of accounts until we meet again, Archie, and then, if the balance is in my favour, pay me."

"Till we meet again——" So far she repeated his words: then her voice broke down, and Gerald Durant felt the greatest difficulty in the world to let her hand go coldly. But the eyes of two grim old ladies, the other occupants of the carriage, were upon them, and the guard was standing, his key already in the lock of the door, and so, perforce, he had to step down on the platform and leave her without more demonstration.

Another hand-pressure, another "Good-bye, Archie," from him. A little brown face, wet with tears, held out to take a last silent look at him as the train moved——

And then the fairest episode of all Gerald Durant's life was over. Archie had left him.

CHAPTER XVII.

“Play, or take Miss?”

It was eleven o'clock, and the little dinner-party in the Temple was going off in the cordial pleasant manner Robert Dennison loved. Loo was being played with spirit; young Sholto McIvor had already lost to a very considerable amount, the other guests were still much in the same position as when they started, and the host was in better spirits than his friends remembered to have seen him in for months. There were two reasons for his being so; first, a vague sensation, a sensation he would not have cared perhaps to define, that he was not going to have very much annoyance with regard to Maggie; secondly, the knowledge that he was in the society of four very young men, all able to pay their losings, and all ready to play until daylight next morning: the kind of men, in short, destined by a benign providence to replenish the purses of poor clever fellows like himself when they chanced to be empty, as was the case with his own at present.

Now, in saying this, I neither say nor infer that Robert Dennison ever played unfairly. It was, on the contrary, his habit to show a punctilious, occasionally a chivalrous, adherence to every written rule of honour in his dealings with his adversaries. The way in which he made cards pay was by selecting fools for his companions: and the only sleight-of-hand, the only sorcery

he employed was that which wins in many other games as well as the game of loo—brains.

It is a fact not invariably recognised, a fact that if recognised might save a good many persons from ruin, that at games of chance, as much as at any other human employment, intellect carries the day against stupidity; science against ignorance. And I do not here speak of the recognised rules of play which any man save a Sholto McIvor may learn by rote, I speak simply of the power of observation and of memory, which in a clever and constant player become, after due apprenticeship, a species of intuition or second-sight. Any man who can remember sequences, who can recollect the juxtaposition of the cards he takes up to shuffle, and can guess with tolerable certainty where they are placed after the cut, can give an ordinary adversary five points out of twenty, at least. Robert Dennison had a lightning-quick eye, an adroit hand, an almost unerring memory, an adamant face, and an admirable faculty for reading the faces of other people. Sholto McIvor and lads of his stamp stood about as much chance of winning from him, in the long run, as infants of six would have if they played with a very knowing old schoolboy of twelve or thirteen for marbles. And yet such men, when their money was gone, would steadfastly assert that luck had been against them, or that their heads had been heated by wine while his was cool, *etcetera*. No man believed Robert Dennison to play unfairly, and no man said it of him. They only failed to perceive that, while he did not aid chance by dishonesty, he governed it—a much more fatal antagonism as far as they were concerned—by science.

The party was going off admirably. Clouds of the excellent tobacco, for which Dennison was famed, made the room fragrant, but not close, for all the windows were wide open, and a freshness that scarcely seemed of the city came in across the Temple Gardens from the river. Every one was in pleasant temper, and Robert Dennison himself, had just been loo'd (for an inconsiderable amount) for showing a card, when a loud knock and ring came at his chambers' door.

Mr. Dennison's face changed colour as he got up hastily from the table; a vision rising before him of his wife, no longer gentle but desperate, coming in straight among them and denouncing him before his friends. "Excuse me a moment," he said, addressing them generally; "we won't be bored by any interruption, and this can't be anyone I want to see. I'll tell Andrew to say no one is here, and—"

The handle of the door turned, and his cousin Gerald walked in. At any other time Dennison would have been intensely annoyed by the interruption; for no man coming in with a cool unheated brain can be said to be an addition to a party of men already excited by wine and play. But, in his intense relief at *not* seeing Maggie, he almost felt that he was glad to see anyone else. "Here in time, old fellow, after all!" he cried, wringing his cousin's hand heartily. "In time for everything but dinner, that's to say. Charteris, Drury, Broughton—you know everybody here, I think?"

"I don't see them at present," said Gerald. "I dare say I shall know them when I do. Hallo, Sholto," he added, as his eyes got gradually accustomed to the mingled light and smoke; "you here?" and coming

across the room he shook hands and exchanged greetings with young McIvor, with a warmth not thoroughly pleasant to Robert Dennison to contemplate.

"If I had thought there was really a chance of your returning," he remarked, coming up with a certain fidgetiness of manner to the table,—as Gerald, after shaking hands with the other men, continued talking to Sholto—"if I had thought there was a chance of your returning, I would have ordered dinner later. As it is—"

"As it is, he's only in time to be in our way, and do no good to himself," interrupted young Sholto. "Come, Durant, and take a hand," he added, making room for Gerald at the table. "Take a hand, and change the luck. I'm beginning to lose most confoundedly already."

"Not for me, thanks," answered Gerald, laconically. "Loo is one of the heavy businesses of life, Sholto, and I'm tired to death—only came off a steamer an hour ago, as you may perceive. Go on with your game as if I was not here, and I'll look on or fall asleep, according to my fancy." Saying which he drew a lounging-chair from the window, and seated himself, not exactly close to Sholto McIvor, but where he could have an easy view of the lad's cards and of his play.

"And what will you take, Gerald?" asked Dennison, who had been narrowly examining his cousin's face and dress. "Claret, hock and seltzer, or what? Brandy, I should say, would be the liquor best suited to your state at present." Taking a decanter from the side-board, and standing it on a little table at Gerald's side: "Cold water, or seltzer, do you think? Seltzer is the best thing in the world, you know, after sea-

sickness. I'm really concerned to see you looking so ill, my poor fellow," he added, with the half-pitying, half-chaffing tone in his voice that it generally pleased him to adopt when he was speaking to his cousin. "I hope sea-sickness alone is the cause of your looking so pale? None of the usual heart-aches, Gerald? or, at all events, nothing worse than one of the usual ones?"

Instead of answering, Gerald poured out about a third of a tumbler of brandy, to which he added a very inconsiderable quantity of water, and drank it off.

"A cure for heart-ache!" cried out young McIvor, with his boyish laugh.

"Sholto, my infant," said Gerald, gravely; "never give opinions on the actions of your elders. Confine your attention to whip-top, loo, and the things you really understand; and in everything else look at us and learn."

Sholto took the remark, as he took everything that occurred in the world around him, with wide-open eyes, a loud laugh, and a total want of understanding. Robert Dennison went back silently to his place. "If any one cares to go on, that is to say," he observed, glancing round the table as he re-seated himself. "As the game is broken up there is not much use, perhaps, in beginning it again. Gerald, you prefer conviviality to cards, I know. Shall we give up loo for this evening? I am quite ready, if the rest are; and you shall sing us the 'Wine-Cup' to cheer our fainting spirits for the night."

"When the wine-cup is sparkling before us," was the after-dinner song, for which Gerald was famous among his friends (as I write I hear his sweet voice

lending itself to that brightest of all Moore's melodies! I see his fair boyish face flushing as it used to flush when he sang!): and every man present seconded in earnest the proposal that Mr. Dennison, who detested singing as much as he detested conviviality, had made in banter.

"Break up your game or not, Robert," Gerald answered, quickly; "but don't ask me to sing. I'm not in a mood for conviviality of any sort to-night."

"Well, if you don't mean to be convivial, I don't see why we should break up our game," cried Sholto McIvor, upon whom the first fever of loo was at its height: and some one else echoing the opinion, Mr. Dennison, very indifferently it seemed, took up the cards.

"I forget whose deal it was, and everything," he remarked. "Some one had just been loo'd for doing something extraordinarily stupid, I believe. Who was it?"

After exerting his brain a little, Mr. Dennison could be brought to recollect that it was himself who had been loo'd for this extraordinary stupidity; also that it was now his deal; and then the game went on—Gerald Durant sitting silently smoking in a position from whence, as I have said, he could see Sholto McIvor's hand and form his own conclusions as to the style of game that young gentleman played.

After two or three deals, he saw, as he had expected to see, that Sholto played like a baby—the more utterly recklessly, the more he lost; also that his money, with some occasional deviations, was steadily flowing into Robert Dennison's hands. And Gerald's blood rose at the sight!

"Not Sholto McIvor," he had said to Dennison when the finding of a man to fill his place had been discussed between them at Morteville; "any one but Sholto." And although Dennison had answered, carelessly, that he had no taste for Sholto, "or for any children," an uneasy foreboding that poor Sholto would, in the end, be asked, had haunted him ever since, and was the cause, mainly, of his being in his cousin's chambers now.

- Any one but Sholto!

Breaking Quixotic lances on behalf of people unable to defend themselves was, ordinarily, not at all one of Gerald Durant's foibles. If young persons, in general, chose to ruin themselves through cards, or any other short and pleasant process, why they were doing very much as he had done; and, considering what a bore life is on the whole, who should say they were not gainers by getting a year or so of real amusement before they came to grief? But as regarded Sholto, his usual easy philosophy shifted singularly. Incapable though Gerald Durant was of very exalted or passionate love, he was capable, on rare occasion, of very true and very strong friendship: a feeling more common, perhaps, than love among all men of his class. When he left Eton, Fergus McIvor, Sholto's elder brother, left it with him. They got their commissions in the Guards in the same week, started their new bright life as emancipated schoolboys—fledgling Guardsmen—together, and loved each other unlike the way most brothers love.

The taint of gambling ran through every member of the McIvor family. In Fergus the hereditary latent germ developed itself into active disease. At the end of four years, he had run through every shilling of his

patrimony, and had put his hand to bills for some thousands which he knew right well it would never be possible for him to meet; was ruined, in short, irretrievably. Then he shot himself. About an hour before his death he was with Gerald, and took leave of him, telling him he was going abroad. "And take care of Sholto," he added, his hand clasped in his friend's; "and, if you can, see that the boy doesn't make such a mull of it all as I have."

Sholto had then newly joined the regiment, and from that time till the present, more than a year and a half, Gerald had watched him faithfully. The lad's fortune was a limited one, with no future prospect of increase, and, unfortunately, was in his own possession now. There was thus every likelihood of his running the same course as his brother, only perhaps a somewhat shorter one, inasmuch as he possessed a smaller amount of money to get rid of. But Gerald was the most unwearying, the most vigilant of mentors. Sholto was the one sole charge of his life, he was accustomed to say, and into that charge he threw all the weight of energy that would have been frittered away into nothing if he had fulfilled the ordinary duties of a citizen. And, jesting apart, it was really no slight responsibility this watching of a baby guardsman of twenty-one. With a heart as open as his blue eyes, a temper impossible to ruffle, and a character for truthfulness not always found in very simple people, Sholto was yet one of the most difficult human creatures conceivable to manage. Whatever his mentor in plain language told him, he would believe and act upon: when it was requisite to get him through any delicate or complex position, hints, suspicions, inuendoes, were as much thrown away

upon poor Sholto, as a blow from a lady's gloved hand would be upon a very boisterous, very stupid Newfoundland puppy.

If Gerald, before he left town, had said to him: "My cousin, Robert Dennison, is not a safe man to play at cards with; don't go if he asks you," Sholto would have obeyed unquestioningly, and probably would have imparted his own suspicions of Dennison's honour to five or six intimate friends the next time he had taken a point more of wine than was good for him. What Gerald had said was: "Don't lose your money faster than you can help while I am gone, Sholto; and, whatever you do, don't play at loo. I've seen a good deal of it—at Dennison's chiefly—and it isn't a winning game for youngsters, take my word for it." And this warning, being much too delicately worded to sink into poor Sholto's brain, he had accepted the first invitation given him by Mr. Dennison, and was now playing loo in as "pleasant" a spirit as any man could possibly show under the circumstances.

And Gerald's blood rose at the sight!

Robert Dennison had made a good thing often before out of men to whom he had himself introduced him, as he had done to Sholto. But those for the most part were Philistines, calico young men, or usurer's sons, or something of that kind—the people one meets among the Guards now; and Gerald could never divest his mind of the idea that their spoliation to a certain extent was rightful. But with Sholto McIvor it was far otherwise. Sholto was the son of a poor Scottish widow—the brother of his own dead friend! And sitting there, watching the lad's flushed face as he pushed one "I.O.U." after another across the table to

Dennison, Gerald Durant resolved within himself that the little game should stop.

He was loth exceedingly to risk a quarrel with Dennison—the more so at this time, when he believed him to be in trouble about that secret marriage of his; but he would rather have made Dennison his enemy for life, than have quietly watched Fergus McIvor's brother losing money that he could in no legitimate manner pay. And he did it.

Sholto was seated on his host's left hand, and the deal was at the present moment again with Dennison; Sholto, consequently, was eldest hand. He had lost with little variation during the hour or so that Gerald had watched the game; and a quiver of irrepressible excitement was on his lips as Dennison finished dealing and looked at him. There was a very heavy loo in the pool, an amount which, if he won it, would go a good way towards pulling him round again, and if he lost it—but the young simpleton did not ask himself what the consequences would be of *that*.

"Well, McIvor, what do you do?" said Dennison, holding "miss" out carelessly, and with his usual half-smile at the corners of his mouth, but with no smile in his eyes. "Play, or take miss?"

Now, in using these four words, there is, as everybody knows, not the faintest deviation from fair dealing; "play, or take miss?" being as much a formula at loo, as "cards" or "how many?" at écarté. But in the tone in which Robert Dennison uttered them to this boy there was, and Gerald felt there was, a tangible, an infinite unfairness. The science of loo more than of any other game resides in caution. Only in the brightest vein of luck, and scarcely then, would a good

player take "miss" with four undeclared hands against him. And Sholto scarcely knew the rules of the game! And the tone of Dennison's voice conveyed to his weak brain that one of these two courses was incumbent upon him: that the possible alternative of throwing up his hand and risking nothing did not exist!

He seized his cards up tremblingly, and Gerald pushed his chair an inch or so nearer to see them clearly. Ten of trumps; knave of clubs; two of clubs: not cards to keep if they had been playing for half-pence. Sholto's lips quivered more and more, as he looked hesitatingly at Dennison's face, and he half moved his hand out across the table.

"Play, or take miss?" repeated Mr. Dennison, suavely. "Now, McIvor, which is it?"

"*What* is it, you mean," remarked Gerald, speaking for the first time since he had been watching them, and in a slow distinct manner, impossible to misconstrue: "'which' implies a choice between playing or taking miss only. McIvor need do neither."

A dead silence followed on the remark; then Robert Dennison spoke in an unruffled voice, and with perfect courtesy of manner:

"What do you do, McIvor, as my cousin insists upon such accurate grammar? Do you take miss or not?"

"No," said poor Sholto, throwing up his cards desperately, "I don't. I don't play."

Neither did the next man, nor the next: sudden caution seemed to have grown contagious: the last player, Broughton, took "miss," and finding that it contained king of trumps, and ace, queen of spades, felt extremely cheerful for a minute, towards Gerald.

For a minute: then, knowing that the dealer was but defending the pool, and flushed by the excellence of his hand, he played, as young players will, for every trick instead of insuring one, and put down his king of trumps. Robert Dennison took up his cards and calmly produced the ace; then the two and three of hearts, and Mr. Broughton was loo'd to the amount of three hundred and seventy odd pounds.

Up to the present moment, the pleasant temper Mr. Dennison loved had prevailed; but now with an oath, Broughton struck his hand down on the table. Such luck, he cried, as his, was never seen before! king of trumps, ace, queen of spades, and to be loo'd by such beggarly cards as those!

"If you had played a spade you would have made two tricks," remarked Dennison, quietly. "You had a magnificent playing hand."

"Yes," returned the other, "that's all very well now you see the cards, but what man living would not have played as I did? You Charteris, you Durant," appealing excitedly round the table, "what would you have done?"

Thereupon arose a Babel of opinions: every man stating what he considered to be right, and the majority siding with Broughton as to the correctness of his play.

"And you, McIvor," said Dennison, turning to Sholto. "What is your opinion about it?"

Sholto was sitting silent, his eyes and mouth wide open, gazing at the cards upon the table. A fresh world had suddenly opened before the young man's intelligence. Here, in plain fact, was demonstrated to him that which Gerald had so often and so vainly striven to prove, namely, that luck is not everything

at loo; that a man with a hand like Broughton's may lose every trick by playing the card which four men out of five called it right to play! I say a fresh world had suddenly opened before Sholto's sight; and, under the embarrassing influence of something like an idea of his own, utterance, for about the sole time in his life, failed him.

"What do you think, McIvor?" repeated Dennison. "Let us have all your opinions as to which is the right play."

And then the first wise speech Sholto McIvor had ever yet made left his lips. "I don't know, Dennison. I know nothing at all about it!" winding up after a minute of profound thought, "but I see there's a great deal more play and—and that—than I ever knew of before in loo."

After which he rose from the table, feeling his body no doubt exhausted by this unwonted pressure of intellect, and going to the sideboard helped himself to brandy and soda and a fresh cigar.

"And your deal," cried Dennison, cheerfully. "When you're ready; we're waiting for you, McIvor."

"No, thanks," said Sholto, "I've done; I've lost as much as is good for me. I shan't play any more—that is to say—" but here he looked at Gerald's face, and reading approbation of his words, grew bolder again. "I'm on duty to-morrow, you see, Dennison, and it's late already. I must ask you to excuse me this time; and—I've lost as much as is good for me."

"As you like, as you like," said Dennison, indifferently; "don't play a minute longer than you choose. Our game does not break up, of course?" addressing

the other men. "Four is as good a number as five any day."

Broughton was sitting, his face as white as a sheet, thinking of what he had lost. He was quite a young fellow, hardly older than McIvor, a clerk in the Treasury, with a salary of one hundred and fifty pounds a year, and an allowance of about as much more from his father, an old general officer, living at Exeter with five unmarried daughters, and with neither means nor inclination to help his sons out of their gambling debts.

"If you'll excuse me, Dennison, I believe I ought to follow McIvor's example. As it is," he leaned across and whispered into Dennison's ear, "I must ask you to take a bill. That last loo was a heavy one, and just at present——"

"To be sure, to be sure, my dear fellow," interrupted Dennison; "you need not speak of it. Manage it just as it suits you best. But of course we do not leave off playing," he added, aloud. "Nothing I dislike so much as leaving off a winner in my own house, and the luck never goes long in one direction at loo."

The two men who had as yet neither won nor lost to any great extent were ready to go on; and young Broughton, desperately recollecting that he had no more means of paying three hundred pounds than seven, and that the present, at all events, was the worst possible time for him to leave off, said: "Yes, let the game go on." And so it was decided.

"And we may as well be off, Sholto," said Gerald, "if you have decided to go. The same cab can take us both to Clarges Street."

"Like two good little boys, told to be back in proper time," added Dennison, looking into Gerald's face for the first time since that interruption of his with regard to grammar. "How delightful it is, Gerald, to see you in your new character of Mentor! The moral and mental guide of youth; it suits you so exactly!"

There was a marked emphasis on the word "mental," but Gerald kept his temper admirably.

"A case of the blind leading the blind; certainly," he answered; "but 'tis the way of human nature. There was a time when you tried to put me through moral training once, Robert."

"Long ago, I am sure!" retorted Dennison. "Yours are all very safe kind of sins, Gerald. Not sins to alarm the most scrupulous cousin or maiden aunt living!"

"They are not the errors of burning my fingers with things I know nothing about," said Gerald, calmly. "That is the indiscretion from which I try to keep Sholto, poor infant! when I can."

Every man at once exchanged a half-look with his neighbour, and Robert Dennison saw it, and the evil red glow came into his dark eyes.

"Burning your fingers, eh, Gerald! Well, that's a figure of speech, you see, and I am too common-place to follow you high-flown, sentimental people. If you had said getting your coat torn to pieces, and running about, minus a hat, at midnight, I might have understood you better."

The altercation had now taken a practical turn, which placed it within the grasp of Sholto McIvor's intellect.

"Your coat torn, Durant? By George, so it is!" he exclaimed; "and your hat gone, eh? or did you leave it outside?"

"No," answered Gerald, quietly still; "I came here without it. I lost my hat on London Bridge, where I also had my coat torn in a row. Does any man want to ask me any more questions?"

"Well," said Dennison, with a sneer, "it would be too much, I suppose, to inquire who your companion was while these remarkable events transpired?"

Gerald remained silent, but his temper was rising fast, and he looked steadily, and with a singularly set expression, into his cousin's face.

"Not Miss—Miss—what was it?" went on Dennison. "The little red-headed woman you and your friend Waters were running about after at Morteville? Wilton—Willis—what was it?"

Gerald Durant had taken a cigar from his case while Dennison was speaking; he bit the end off with mathematical exactness, and lighted it; took two or three calmly critical inhalations as if to test the flavour, then he spoke. For a minute the angry blood had dyed his fair face scarlet: he was pale now, and his words came from him slow and distinct, as the manner of some men is when they are under the influence of passion.

"I don't think you know any ladies of my acquaintance well enough to be familiar with their names, Robert, so no wonder you are rather inaccurate at times. What friend of yours—a lady, too—do you suppose I saw, or fancied I saw, upon London Bridge to-night?"

"Oh, I—I have nothing to do with ladies," ex-

claimed Dennison, shuffling about the cards, and for an instant horribly disconcerted by this unexpected blow. "I've nothing to do with running after young ladies. I leave that to men like you—and Waters!"

"Well, the face I saw was a Staffordshire face," said Gerald. "A Staffordshire face (very wan and white now) that you and I knew well, or one so like it as to be its ghost, crouching away from men's eyes in a recess on London Bridge. Of course it couldn't be the one we knew, Robert; it could be nothing but a chance resemblance; but for a moment the sight of that face sickened me, I can assure you."

"A—a Staffordshire face!" said Robert, keeping his own with marvellous self-command: but the cards dropped from his hands. "I don't know what you are talking of."

"All right," returned Gerald, coldly. "Perhaps when you think matters over, you may chance to light upon some clue to the enigma. Good-night, Drury; Good-night, Charteris—Broughton. Now, Sholto, are you ready?"

And, without stopping to shake hands with anyone, Gerald Durant walked away out of the room, followed by Sholto, who was dimly conscious that he had been the cause of something disagreeable, and was vacillating within himself as to whether he ought to offer apologies to his host or demand them.

It was the last time but one that Gerald Durant ever crossed his cousin's threshold.

During all the remainder of that night, from the first deal after the departure of Gerald and Sholto until they left off with the bright summer morning shining in upon them, the cards went steadily against Robert

Dennison. He was not a loser on the whole, twenty or thirty pounds of his winnings still remained to him. But twenty or thirty pounds, after sitting up all night with men like these, was not the kind of sum Mr. Dennison proposed winning: and long after his guests were gone, he stood, with folded arms, beside his open window, gazing out into the Temple Gardens, and moodily thinking over all that the last twelve hours had brought to him: his wife's visit; Gerald's inopportune return and altered manner; young Sholto McIvor's abrupt departure; his own failing luck.

He had not a grain of superstition in his nature. No belief did he hold save in himself: his own quick brain, his own strong arm. Life to him was like loo; a game to be turned aside, certainly, by the temporary accumulation of accidents men call luck, but in which perseverance and ability must, in the long run, win perforce. So now, no foreboding of the spirit, no sinking of the heart, overcame him. He simply thought. Sholto McIvor—he dismissed the least important subject first—was lost: but other Sholto McIvors might easily be found. Gerald, he could see, would never be present at another card party in his house. Well, Gerald, in his time, had bled pretty freely, and had introduced him to a great many good things in Guardsmen, and the like. You can expect no mine to last for ever: Gerald, as regarded cards, had been worked well. Now came the thought of Maggie, and of those words of his cousin's that fitted in with such dread significance concerning her. Robert Dennison thought of her as he saw her last night: the marble lips laid down to press his pillow; the cold hands clinging round his neck; the good-bye of the clammy

lips; the half-threats that she was going where she would trouble him no more! All these he accurately remembered: and then, in weird juxtaposition, Gerald Durant's words sounded in his ears. A wan woman's face—a Staffordshire face they both knew well, crouching in one of the recesses of London Bridge. They had been intended, possibly, as an idle taunt: might they not, in reality, prove to be the first whisper of an awful truth?—the first news of a burthen taken away from him?—darkly, horribly taken away: but *taken!*

Every appliance of bachelor comfort was to be found in Robert Dennison's rooms: an admirable apparatus for making coffee among them of course. It stood ready on the sideboard now: the coffee and water measured ready for the one inordinately-strong cup that it was Mr. Dennison's habit to take at hours like these.

He was a man who habitually, and on principle, did with little sleep—the spending of needless hours in inanition seeming a stupidity to him; and, after sitting up at cards all night, was accustomed to take a cup of strong coffee, then get out his books and papers and work, instead of going to bed, when daylight came.

He was not fit for work on this particular morning; but he was less fit still for sleep. So he made his coffee, took out his narghili and tobacco—more excellent even than he gave his friends—and exchanged his evening attire for a dressing-gown and slippers. Then he drew his most luxurious arm-chair beside the window; put his feet up on another; and with the

fragrant coffee and his tobacco-pouch on the table by his side, set himself to think again.

The morning sun shone in upon him thus: shone red on his pale, keen, untired face; on his white, ringed hand, as it rested on his cashmere dressing-gown; on his embroidered velvet slippers (Maggie's work); on the *débris* of cards and expensive wines still standing on the table. Shone red, too, on the river—fresh and transparent as even the London Thames can look in the light of an August morning like this.

It was low tide now; and numbers of men and boys—dredger-men, rat-catchers, sewer-groppers, and the like human creatures that extract a living, God knows how! out of the mud and refuse of the river—were already at their work, Robert Dennison noticed. He watched them and thought of what their work was: thought how secrets of shame, and sin, and despair must come to light occasionally in these early summer mornings! How, at this very hour, the red sun might be resting on some ghastly burden of the river—here, close at hand among the London shipping, or far away among the silent marshes; in the pleasant freshness of the country, with the birds singing, and the sedges waving on the banks.

Mr. Dennison did not philosophise; he did not sentimentalise; neither did he regret or feel afraid in aught. He thought as a lawyer thinks over the bare facts that were in his possession; and the few speculations he entered upon were wholly practical ones. If anything had happened (I write with more circumlocution than he thought) it would most likely be made known first in the evening papers. And they were

published at four—more than ten hours, that is to say, from the present time.

He was not sentimental; he was not cowardly; and as to conscience—well, conscience he viewed in the light of a custom or superstition, which, varying in detail among different nations, is mainly of use in subordinating weak men to strong ones.

But in spite of this, in spite of all his callousness and all his scepticism, Robert Dennison shuddered as he pictured to himself how this intervening time, the eternity of these next ten hours, would pass!

CHAPTER XVIII.

Among the Philistines.

As soon as the train was fairly in motion, and Gerald Durant irrevocably parted from her, Miss Lovell burst into tears. No woman looks beautiful when she cries, but Archie's face was so soft and dimpled and childish, that she did not look very ugly, even with a red nose; and the two old maiden ladies, who were sitting at the other end of the carriage, regarded her kindly in her grief, and made up their minds that she was a schoolgirl, weeping innocently at parting from her brother after the holidays. What would they have felt—how would they have looked—could they have known the atrocious truth? What anathemas would not their hearts have fulminated, could they have guessed that this fair-seeming, baby-faced young person had been running away from home, and that the man to whose hand she clung so tenderly at parting was a stranger? Happily, we none of us walk through the world with the story of our iniquities written upon our foreheads. Archie cried and rubbed her eyes till they were scarlet; then choked back her tears; then found that they would burst forth again, with a sob instead of silently; and the two old ladies looked at her with ever-increasing pity, and even exchanged speculations as to whether or not the girl was too old to have peppermint lozenges offered as an alleviation of her sorrow.

As long as they were surrounded by dingy London suburbs, Archie's eyes continued blind; but by the time the train reached Croydon, she began to feel better; and then, remembering that there was no use in crying any longer, she wiped away the last tears resolutely from her eyes, and leaned her flushed face out in the fresh, cool country air. It was a brilliant night; one of those rare nights which, four or five times a year, bathe our English harvest-fields in light as lustrous as ever quivers upon the shores of the Adriatic. The air was so transparent that every object, for miles and miles around, could be seen distinctly in the ebon and silver pencilling of moonlight: the sky was as wonderful a blue as Archie had ever seen in Italy. Italy! the country about Croydon, in no wise, save in its flatness, resembles the Campagna; but just at that moment—evoked by I know not what subtle train of associations—Rome, and the Roman days of long ago, flashed suddenly before the girl's vision. She was a little child again, walking home from the Protestant burial-ground, her hand in her father's, through the ghostly Roman streets at night—often stopping as they walked for him to note some new effect of light or shade, or to polish aloud some grandiloquent lay of ancient Rome—never destined, alas, to eclipse Macaulay's! Then, even as she strove to recall its details more clearly, this picture faded and changed into another: of a summer night in Genoa, and she was in the garden of the *Acqua Sola*, looking across the sleeping city to where one glorious planet cast a broad white track upon the tideless waters of the bay. This time it was not her father's hand she held. Her father was sitting apart from her, not speaking; she and Bet-

tina and a third person, an Englishman, were together. Then she grew sleepy, she remembered, in the warm lemon-scented air; and her head sank down upon the Englishman's shoulder, and when she opened her eyes again, she found herself in his strong arms, being borne slowly along, in a delicious half-dream, through starlit thickets of oleander and vine to the villa Andreo, outside the city walls, where her father lived. The villa Andreo—as clear as if she had left it yesterday, the familiar old place, half palace, half farmhouse, seemed to rise before her in the moonlight. The mildewed inlaid stairs, the echoing rooms, where firewood was piled against the frescoed walls, and Indian corn was laid out to dry on marble floors, the broken fountain, the garden choked with weeds and red with roses, where she and Tino played! Vividly, with a mysterious sense of its being bound up with something she had done or seen to-day, Archie recalled it all: then, with a start, and a quick glance at her companions to see if they were watching her face, her thoughts came suddenly back to the present, and all the adventures—adventures with no delightful gloss of excitement on them now—that lay before her. The crossing alone at night; the landing at Morteville; the chance of being seen by early loiterers on the pier; the return home; last, but by no means least, the suspicions and inquiries that, as a natural consequence, must follow when the dilapidated condition of Mrs. Lovell's best parasol should be discovered. She never for one moment meant to hide from her father and Bettina the history of her journey; but to confess that she had, of malice aforethought, taken the French grey parasol—the lovely gift of Madame Bonnechose—with her, was, she felt,

virtue superhuman, virtue beyond her strength. To have run away to London with Mr. Durant seemed light compared with such guilt! and through many a long mile of her moonlit journey, Miss Lovell's face was set and overcast as she pondered over the possibility of cleaning silk with *eau de benzine*; of wrapping up the silver papers, fold by fold, as Bettina wrapped them; finally, of bearing with cold unmoved face the horrible esclandre that must one day descend upon the household when this, her secret sin, should be dragged to light!

Her knowledge of the world may be more justly estimated by thinking of her thus, perhaps, than by any long description of her ignorance. Pondering over the soiled parasol when all the best part of her life, her childhood, her girlhood, her crown of fresh and pure repute, had been tarnished—put away from her for ever by the mad escapade of the last ten hours!

The train stopped at Ashford for five minutes, and several of the passengers, with the usual restlessness of Englishmen, got out and paced up and down the platform. Archie put her head through the window—all traces of tears passed away—to look about her; and was much struck by the tempting aspect of the fruit on a refreshment stall nearly opposite her carriage. Great ripe plums—and she adored plums—apricots, rosy and golden, and other minor temptations. Would there be time before the train started for her to buy some? She put the question to her fellow-passengers and they answered yes; whereupon Miss Lovell got the door opened by the guard and ran across to make her purchases. A dozen plums? yes, for she must give

some to the old ladies: and cherries? yes: and six apricots? and how much to pay?—gathering the fruit in her scarf, and already biting deep with her little white teeth into an apricot—how much to pay?

“Twelve plums, two shillings; six apricots, one shilling and sixpence; cherries, sixpence—four shillings altogether.”

Four shillings: five francs: for about as much fruit as she could have bought in Morteville for twenty sous! Archie's face turned burning hot with shame. “I have bought more than I can pay for,” she cried aloud, in Italian—a sure index, always, to the intensity of her emotions—and pulled out her poor little purse nervously. The coins it contained were two francs and a half; for Gerald had bought her through ticket to Morteville, and she had steadfastly refused to borrow more of him. These she tendered; and these the refreshment woman, after scornfully subjecting them to the light, returned. She never took foreign money of any kind.

“Now, gentlemen, take your places!” cried the guard's voice at this moment; and Archie's agony of mind reached its culminating point. She had four shillings' worth of fruit in her scarf, and had eaten one apricot, she had no available money, a stern English woman looking implacably impertinent in her face, and the train was just about to start without her. Her heart had not beat with pain so intense at the moment when she had found herself going away from Morteville with Gerald. She had a companion, a protector, with her then. She stood alone at midnight, a miserable detected impostor in a foreign country, and among hard foreign faces, now.

"Take your places, gentlemen," reiterated the guard's voice impatiently.

Archie turned her face round in despair, and the man in the grey overcoat—the man who had brushed by her as she stood with Gerald outside the station in London—was at her side.

"The lady has no English money," he said, quite quietly, and as if it was the most natural commonplace thing that he should interfere. "How much do you want? four shillings." And in a minute, before Archie could think sufficiently to say yes or no, the money was paid; and then, half through the agency of the guard, half through that of the man who had befriended her, she found herself in her place, the train once more in motion, and the two old ladies, her fellow-passengers, staring stonily at her and at the four shillings' worth of fruit that she was holding in her scarf.

She offered them each an apricot, the most odorous and ripe she could select, but they declined with pinched shakes of the head, with acid pursed-up lips. They had watched the whole scene at the refreshment stall; and had formed dark conclusions primarily from the young woman's want of money (that safest ground whereupon human beings may always found their belief in each other's worth); and secondly, from her allowing a stranger of the opposite sex to pay for her. Were they to condone such impropriety by partaking of these fruits?

A blank sensation fell on the child's heart at their rejection of her. "The people in England are Philistines, all of them," she thought bitterly. "First, all those men who stared at me in the London station, and now these cruel-eyed women refusing my fruit because I

have not been introduced to them, or some such rubbish. I hate England—except when I am with Gerald! I hate all the people who live in it. Oh, the happiness of being in the Morteville steamer, and knowing that I'm going back to papa, and that I have done with England and the English for ever!"

And then, though she was in reality all but crying, Miss Lovell began to sing aloud: French songs, Italian songs, anything that came into her head; and she ate more fruit than was good for her, throwing the stones away with reckless rapidity through the window: then she put her feet up on the opposite seat, leaned back her head and looked at her fellow travellers with something of the expression she had been wont to assume towards Mesdames O'Rourke and Maloney at home.

The instincts of Bohemianism were deep-rooted, almost like religious convictions, in Archie's heart. Ever since she could think at all she had had a vague sense that respectability, Philistines, "grocers," and her father, were on opposite sides; consequently, that it was for her to do battle with respectability. Chemists tell us that between the basest substances and the most refined odours exist relationships near and subtle almost beyond their powers of analyzation. With slight transmutation the vile-smelling potato-spirit becomes possessed of delicious pine-apple fragrance; the horrible oil of gas tar is changed into the delicious "Essence de Mirbane." Is it only so in the material world that we can grossly test? Are not the moral, like the physical forces, so finely, so mysteriously poised, that circumstances alone can decide whether their affinity be for things good or evil, for pestilence and death, or for

exquisite aroma and freshness? It was so at all events in Archie's case at this immature period of her life. Side by side with the germ of everything best and noblest—with hatred of shams, love of freedom, courage to uphold the principles or person she loved against the world—were the germs of obstinate rebellion, the possibility of utter alienation from right, in the poor little girl's heart.

"Capable of anything, in short!" the two old ladies whispered to each other, as a final verdict upon her when the train was slackening speed outside Folkestone; and they were not far from the truth. Archie Lovell was capable of anything: if she had possessed a cigarette would at that moment have smoked it under their noses, regardless of them, and of the guard, and of the railway regulations alike. Capable of anything! It was for the future to decide what direction the good and the evil of her nature should take. As she sat now, with flushed face and careless attitude, and defiant parted lips, showing her white teeth as she sang, I believe a great many persons of her own sex would have joined with the two old female Philistines in labelling her "Dangerous."

The crimson sunrise shone upon the amphitheatre of hills around Morteville when the mail packet arrived there, and early as it was the whole French population of the place seemed already astir; bouquet sellers, shrimp sellers, water carriers, and not a few of the great Parisian ladies, going down in wonderful amphibious costumes to bathe. Miss Lovell cared for none of these people. What she mortally feared was being seen by any of her own countrywomen on her road home. The story

of her flight must, she thought, be written — so plainly that an Englishwoman who ran might read it — upon her tumbled white dress, her grand parasol at this unearthly hour of the morning, her dishevelled hair, her wearied, travel-worn face! No English person, however, did she meet save Captain Waters, thirty or forty yards away from the end of the pier, and quite too far off, she fervently hoped, to have noticed her among the other passengers landing from the mail boat. Waters touched his hat as usual when they passed, giving her dress and herself no more apparent attention than if she had been walking with her father at noonday, and with a lightened heart, her first terrible fear of being seen over, Miss Lovell ran lightly on towards the Rue d'Artois. The *porte-cochère* of the house was already open, the portress not to be seen, the shutters of old Mrs. Maloney's lodgings opposite were closed: everything was in her favour. With a quick and noiseless hand Archie unlocked and reclosed the outer door of their apartment, and in another minute, after stealing breathless and on tip-toe along the silent corridor, found herself once more safe in the little salon: her secret, thus far at all events, still in her own keeping.

The chair was standing where she had left it when she fastened the rose into her waist-belt yesterday; and mechanically Archie crossed the room and took her place before the glass. When she saw her own disordered image looking at her, a shocked, ashamed feeling made the blood rush up into her face. She felt as though months, years, rather than hours, must have passed by since she stood there last; smiling and neat and fresh, and saying to herself what a pretty girl she was! She was no longer neat and fresh. Her

face was tired and jaded, her hat was battered, her muslin scarf and dress bore the unmistakable crush and soil of steamers and London smoke and London pavements. Was the freshness gone from more than scarf and dress? Had that wild escapade, those long hours alone with Gerald Durant, taken the first ineffable bloom away from a heart that was a child's yesterday? Archie did not ask herself (no really innocent people ever enter upon speculations as to their own innocence); but she did wonder whether it would be possible for her to look so changed and old and for all the world not to find out her secret from her face? For Bettina and her father she cared little: the bare thought that Jeanneton, or the milkwoman, or the porter's wife, might suspect her of aught amiss, made her blood run hot and cold by turns: and recollecting that it was now broad day, and time for all the household to be astir, she ran to her own room to change her dress, and bathe some colour back to her tired face.

The porter's wife was the first person whom she saw. Madame Brun, a fat good-humoured old woman of fifty, the typical French portress, rang the bell of the *rez-de-chaussée* between seven and eight, and was quickly answered by mademoiselle in person; mademoiselle in her neat morning frock as usual, her face fresh and smiling, her wet hair hanging round her shoulders, a paint-brush and palette — Archie's first hypocrisy — in her hand; and immediately, with the unfailing readiness of her class and nation, Madame Brun took all further trouble in story-telling off Archie's hands. She had taken in mademoiselle's milk herself: was mademoiselle to be roused from her bed at six because Jeanneton, lazy good-for-nothing, chose to go

holiday-making and leaving the poor little mademoiselle alone? She, Madame Brun, would have come in and offered her services yesterday, but just after she heard mademoiselle return in the afternoon—six o'clock it was, for she happened to remark the town clock strike at the time—some people came to look at the apartments on the fourth, and after that *etcetera, etcetera*. And when Jeanneton came back it was the same scene re-enacted. The women knew they had neglected the girl in her parents' absence; and in their anxiety to screen themselves screened her. Madame Brun had heard mademoiselle enter the house yesterday at six by the town clock; Jeanneton was delighted to find from the state of the larder that mademoiselle had eaten well while she was alone. And mademoiselle's painting! Great heavens, how it had progressed since yesterday! How mademoiselle must have worked! There was the cock on the top of St. Etienne's spire, and two ladies going in at the door to the offices, as natural as life.

And so when Mr. and Mrs. Lovell returned such a Babel of falsehood greeted them before they crossed their threshold, as made Archie's part for the present an easy one to play. All that mademoiselle had felt, and thought, and eaten, and drunk—every unnecessary and circumstantial falsehood that could enter even into the heart of a French servant to conceive—did Jeanneton unhesitatingly tell. How mademoiselle had been a little lonely at first, but cheered up towards evening, and made an excellent supper (off the beautiful cold fillet, madame knew), and how they had gone to bed early to make the day seem shorter, and this morning mademoiselle rose with the sun and had been

painting—but painting, so that monsieur would scarcely recognise her picture. All of which Archie, in inward hot indignation, had to condone, perforce, by her silence. It was the first time in her life that she had told her father a falsehood; and coming from Jeanneton's lips the falsehood seemed to lower her more in her own sight than it would have done had she told it boldly herself. She was too thoroughly honest, poor little sturdy Bohemian, to employ moral casuistry of any kind on behalf of her own conscience. A falsehood was a falsehood, and to act one was to tell one. Had she not spoken well when she told Gerald Durant that she was only half-civilized as yet?

On ordinary occasions, even after an absence of a day, Mr. Lovell, the moment he returned, would bear his daughter off to his painting-room, and spend an hour at least in looking at her face, and listening greedily to all her little chatter concerning what had happened in his absence. And had he done so now, Archie's secret would infallibly have been told. But Mr. Lovell had made unusually large and valuable purchases at the Amiens sale, and his bric-à-brac, the most fragile of all merchandize, was being now brought up by porters from the Morteville station. With a newly-acquired *bonheur du jour* of Madame de Pompadour and a veritable Boule clock in perilous transition, even Archie, after his first kiss from her, was forgotten; and Bettina of course was far too eager to rush off to the kitchen and the larder on the scent of Jeanneton's possible knaveries, to bestow attention on Archie's heavy eyes and pale face. And so the first opportunity for confession passed by.

"The *bonheur du jour* cost me six hundred francs, and will sell for three thousand," cried Mr. Lovell, with kindling eyes. "If I could meet with bargains like this every day, child, our fortune would be made."

"Tea is six francs a pound, Archie, and you and Jeanneton have drunk a quarter of a pound since yesterday," said Bettina, putting her head in at the door; "I made a little mark on the caddy, to be sure. A franc and a half a day is ten francs and a half a week; forty-two francs a month—forty-two francs a month for tea alone! So much for your housekeeping, Archie."

Poor Archie after this stole away to her own bedroom, and there, seated at her window and gazing out into the street, she passed two or three of the first really desolate hours she had ever known. No one came to interrupt her: her father, without his coat, and covered all over with fragments of bass and straw like a gigantic Guy Fawkes, stood unswathing his cabinets and his clocks, tenderly as a nurse would unswathe a baby, in the courtyard; while Bettina was in the full fury of incoherent Anglo-Gallic battles with Jeanneton—who, to keep up the fable of mademoiselle's excellent appetite, and not unmindful of "son Pierre," had privately secreted goodly portions of all the eatables in the house.

"Old cabinets, and Madame de Pompadour, Jeanneton's sins, and my bad housekeeping!" said Archie, bitterly to herself. "These are the subjects of real vital importance in our household. Such a little affair as my having run away to London and back, is nothing

compared to them. Why, even the horrible man in grey took more interest in my concerns than they do."

She rose and leant her face out through the window just as she was giving utterance aloud to this small piece of childish injustice, and as she did so a sight met her which made the words die on her lips—the blood rush with suffocating oppression to her heart. There, exactly opposite her window, and looking up over the door, evidently to find out the number of their house, stood the man himself! the well-known grey overcoat hanging upon his arm, his face, every line of which was impressed with distinctness upon her memory, upturned, so that Miss Lovell could see it plainly.

She drew back in an instant, and sank with trembling limbs upon a chair. This man had tracked her then, and had come to denounce her to her father. The story was to be told, softened by no explanation of hers, but by the cruel unsympathizing lips of a stranger; of a man who had watched her alone with Gerald Durant in London, who had seen her fill her scarf with fruit that she had no money to pay for on her journey home! No sense of the improbability of a stranger taking such extraordinary interest in her or in her misdeeds struck her. A boy who has been robbing a cherry-orchard believes that every ploughman, every urchin he meets, must be on the road to denounce him to the farmer, and Archie had a similar overwhelming consciousness of her guilt and impending detection. She started back from the window, sank down trembling in her chair, and then, with bloodless cheeks and beating heart awaited her doom: heard the porter's bell ring; heard Jeanneton's shrill tones in parlance with a

stranger—a moment later heard the sound of a man's deep voice alternating with Bettina's and with her father's in the salon. The cold damps gathered thick on the poor little thing's forehead; her clasped hands turned to ice as they lay heavily on her lap. It seemed to her as though she lived through all her life anew during the agony of the next ten minutes. It was no new thing this waiting to be summoned into the presence of her awful enemy: it had happened all before, not once, but a score of times. A score? Was there any moment of her whole past life which had not been coloured with a ghastly prophetic on-coming of her present pain? In ten minutes the door of the salon opened, and the dead calmness of despair fell upon the girl's heart. She knew that her hour had come. A minute later, and Bettina entered the room, a strange flush on her faded face, her cap awry, a light that was not that of anger in her eyes.

"Archie, Archie, child," she cried, stammering with excitement, and never noticing the whiteness of her step-daughter's face. "It has come at last."

"What has come?" said Archie, rising bravely to meet her fate, and never doubting that "it" must be the news of her own guilt. "Tell me at once, please. I can bear it."

"We have got a living at last—he was seventy-seven years of age, and read without spectacles till a fortnight ago, and your grandfather—time, I am sure—has awakened at length to his duty and given it us. Oh, Archie," melting into tears, "to think of his coming here at once to tell us! met Lord Lovell by accident in Piccadilly, and only back from India three

days! and he says the rectory at Hatton isn't more than a mile from his own house."

"Who is he, and what is Hatton, Bettina? and has grandpapa or the man without spectacles come to tell us?"

"Hatton is your father's living, Archie; and heaven knows this is no time for levity! Four hundred a year, without the glebe, and Major Seton himself has come to tell us. He's going to leave the army, and we shall be near neighbours, and——"

"Major Seton!" In a second the past was all unlocked before Archie's sight—the clue given to her imperfect recollections of the stranger's face in London—to the confused dreams of Italy that had haunted her upon her moonlit journey. "Ralph, dear Ralph!"

Without waiting to hear another word, she rushed past Bettina out of the room; and a minute later her enemy, her denouncer, the mysterious man in grey himself, had seized her vehemently in his arms, and was covering her face with kisses.

CHAPTER XIX.

Old Love and New.

"AH! She is not a little girl now, Major Seton," remarked Bettina, who had followed in time to watch the meeting, and who, even in the first blissful intoxication of being a rector's wife, could remember the proprieties. "Archie is seventeen, a grown-up girl, and has been introduced into society already." An hour ago Bettina would have said "introduced at a Morteville ball," but with returning position had awakened the old instinctive euphemisms of the world.

"Seventeen—is it possible?" said the stranger. "Why, it seems only yesterday since she was a little girl—a little girl I could carry very conveniently in my arms about the garden at Genoa."

"But I am not a little girl now," cried Miss Lovell, hot and scarlet still after Major Seton's greeting of her. "I was seventeen the twelfth of last October."

"But very unlike a qualified, grown-up young lady still," Mr. Lovell remarked, drawing the girl to his side, and giving her a look which plainly told how much better than any qualified young lady he thought her. "Archie has had strange companionship at times, and I am afraid will not be very much like a rector's daughter for awhile. Imagine, Ralph, the child has never been in England yet."

"Indeed!" Major Seton stroked down his moustache thoughtfully at this information, and gave a side-long

inquiring look at Archie's face. The blue eyes met his unflinchingly; the girlish figure stood up bravely, though every nerve was trembling with excitement, at Mr. Lovell's side.

"He says nothing!" she thought at last, drawing a freer breath as Major Seton, to her intense surprise and relief, remained silent. "Is he shy, or stupid, or is it possible that he doesn't remember me? Perhaps he is as foolish about me as ever—poor dear old Ralph! and if he is, I can soon make him believe anything I choose."

And then she turned away, and artfully quitting the subject of her own foreign bringing-up, began to heap pretty congratulations upon her father: wondering what England would be like, and what his duties would be, and how many sermons he would have to write a week—holding her soft cheek against his forehead, and caressing the hair back from his temples just as, years ago, she used to caress Ralph himself when she was a child playing among the roses in the ruined garden at Genoa with Major Seton, her adorer, her vassal, her slave, at her feet.

Her slave: ay, he was that, she recollected well. Her slave, physically, carrying her in his arms, under the broiling sun, or crushing his great shoulders under impossible places at hide-and-seek; her inexorable master, the only one she had ever really owned, in matters of conscience. Once, when she was about eleven years old, she had told a deliberate story, though not a very black one, about the breaking of a china cup on which Bettina set great store; and Ralph, cognizant of the sin and of the falsehood alike, had given her his mute support throughout; had even al-

lowed Mrs. Lovell to throw the blame upon a certain little Tino, Archie's Italian sweetheart for the time being. "If you don't like to tell the truth, don't tell it," he said to her in secret. "I shall not betray you to Bettina, and I will play with you just as usual; only—don't kiss me; I will never let you kiss me until you are brave enough to take the blame off Tino." And with this awful pressure brought to bear upon her, Archie had confessed, and been punished, had given her white goat to Tino, and then loved Ralph Seton a hundred times better than ever for his severity.

The whole story came back upon her recollection at this moment; and even while she felt assured as to "poor old Ralph's" outward allegiance, the wonder crossed her whether in a matter of morals he would be as implacably severe as ever. "If he is, I can bear it," she thought, throwing a glance at him from beneath her long lashes. "If he did recognise me in London, and is only pretending before papa, I am not afraid. The punishment I thought so dreadful in Genoa, eight years ago, would not be much of a punishment in Morteville now." And Miss Lovell gave a little impertinent shudder at the thought of poor old Ralph's ugly face, and how his rough moustache had rasped her cheeks when he kissed her a minute ago.

Major Seton was certainly not a man to charm the fancy of any very young girl who had just parted from the handsome face and refined courtly presence of Gerald Durant. He was tall—well over six feet—deep-chested, and thin-flanked: a very model of manly strength, but built too much after the square solid fashion due to his Scottish descent to have a vestige of grace about him. His head, of the type that a friend

would call good honest Saxon—an enemy, cocoa-nut shaped—was set somewhat stiffly on his broad soldier-like shoulders. His feet were large; his hands were large, and excessively brown; and in his face there was not a handsome feature! Ordinary dark-grey eyes; a short, but by no means Grecian nose; a huge reddish-blond moustache entirely covering his mouth and the true Scottish height of cheek-bone. His chin, prominent and firmly cut, was the solitary point that could be called good in all that rugged exterior; for the effect of a row of white even teeth was marred by one of the front ones being broken short in two, a defect that it had never entered into Major Seton's brain to have remedied by art. His complexion, which had been fair as a boy, was tanned by exposure of all kinds, by Indian sun last of all, to a brown several shades darker than his hair; and its darkness was rendered still more conspicuous by a white jagged cicatrice, the mark of a sabre-cut he had received in his youth, which cleft just above the left eye-brow, and showed again, deep and irregularly traced, upon the bronze cheek beneath. This ancient wound, perhaps, joined to the weather-beaten skin and the broken front tooth, gave Major Seton that indescribable look which can be justly conveyed by no other word than battered. Jeanne-ton, when she let him in, summed him up briefly in her mind as a "vieux moustache." To Archie, in five minutes, he was "poor old Ralph." Not perhaps quite so advanced in years as her father or Bettina, but old, very old; thoroughly out of the world of Gerald and herself; an antediluvian creature with big hands and feet, a weather-beaten face, and a huge rough moustache that grated when he kissed you!

And yet this vieux moustache, this antediluvian creature, was a man younger in heart and spirit than Gerald Durant, and under thirty yet in actual age. Major Seton had lived much—though not in the sense which makes a Guardsman old at five-and-twenty! Poverty, self-denial, the sacrifice of every small and paltry pleasure to one great principle, had been necessities early thrust upon him in his boyhood; and what he had accepted perforce then, had simply become an ingrained part of his nature now. Scotch, as their name implies, by descent, the Setons for two generations had been settled on a small estate in Staffordshire, which had entered the family by the marriage of Ralph's grandfather with an English heiress—or a lady whose fortune, compared with that of the Setons, entitled her to be so called. The only son of this marriage, James Seton, lived long enough to spend every shilling he could touch of his inheritance; to involve his estate in debt; to marry a girl without a farthing, and leave an orphan heir to his debts in the person of Ralph.

The boy was sixteen years of age, and at Eton still, when his father died. He had always been brought up, by tutors and servants, to look upon himself as possessing considerably better prospects than most boys. There was money forthcoming he knew, whenever he liked to ask for it. There were generally a couple of hunters ready for his use, and all kinds of conviviality and dissipation going on at home during the vacation. His father had avowedly sent him to Eton to play cricket, and keep up the habits and opinions of an English gentleman—and this the boy had done. His ideas of duty and of life in general were, to play

cricket twenty-seven hours a week and read a little, but very little, for the classics at school; and to ride, shoot, play billiards, dine and drink with his elders, during the holidays. And so, while Gerald Durant was receiving all good and motherly advice from Lady Durant in the pious shelter of the Court, Ralph Seton at Ludbrooke Hall, five miles away from them, was with his ruined father and his father's associates, leading a life during each vacation that already made the boy talked of as a baby-prodigal, a hopeful chip of the old block, throughout the country.

But at sixteen, the age when Gerald's emancipation from virtue was hereafter to begin, came young Seton's emancipation from vice—such skin-deep, schoolboy vice, of drinking and betting and billiard playing as it was! His father died: and on the day of the funeral, the trustees told the boy the exact amount of debts to which he was heir. So many thousands of pounds from which the estate must legally clear itself; so many other thousands which, being personal debts, or debts of honour, a son might lawfully disclaim on coming of age.

Ralph had loved his father with the kind of passionate affection which open-handed, jovial, devil-may-care men like James Seton not unfrequently inspire in the children they are ruining; and not one bitter thought rose in his heart as the prospect of his own beggared life was laid before him. "My father never denied me anything—my father never said a harsh word to me in my life." These were the only words he could stammer out; these were the recollections which made the tears run, like a girl's, down his face, when relations and lawyer spoke to him, with solemn looks and big words, of his father's extravagance, and

the awful warnings that all these squandered thousands ought to prove to him. And the relations and lawyer exchanged opinions during their journey back to London after the funeral, as to whether the boy was a milksop or stupid, or only reckless like poor James.

He was not a milksop or stupid, neither was he at sixteen a hero or a philosopher. In intellect Ralph was then, as now, a very ordinary fellow indeed; but something better than intellect—a large loving heart, and strength of will, derived possibly from remote Scottish ancestors, not certainly from the training of his early years—made him take up and hold to a noble purpose in life. Not a shilling of his dead father's debts but should eventually be paid: not a stain should rest upon his dead father's name if the work of his own right arm, the sacrifice of his whole life if need be, could cleanse it away. If Ludbrooke were let at once, the estate would clear itself in five years, the trustees had told him. In another five or six years, he calculated for himself, the debts of "honour" of James Seton might also be paid. What was to become of the heir of Ludbrooke during this time?—for the foregoing little exercise in arithmetic included no payments whatever save those to creditors. The poor boy on the evening of the funeral went round to the stables, the least desolate place it seemed to him, and standing there alone, looking wistfully at his favourite horse, a hunter James Seton had given two hundred guineas for some months before, asked himself this question: What was to become, during the next ten or twelve years, of the heir of Ludbrooke?

Most men in whom lies the germ of solid success

can early test their own capacities pretty accurately. Standing alone with tear-stained cheek on this miserable day, when he stepped abruptly from childhood to man's estate, Ralph Seton examined, one by one, his abilities, such as they were, and decided that as far as books and study went he could do—nothing. He did not for a moment doubt his own strength in aught save books. An Eton boy of sixteen knows tolerably well the sort of place he has held, and is likely to hold, among his peers. Young Seton was bold of spirit, strong in body; and possessed no small portion of that robust common sense and tact combined for which the Scotch word "canny" has not an English equivalent. In the world of boys he had held his ground, and he had no doubt of holding it in the world of men. Only, in what capacity? On this forlorn evening he thought over every employment by which money, traditionally, can be made—the bar, or East India service, or literature, for none of which he had capacity; commerce, for which he had neither capacity nor capital—then decided that, as he could choose no profession by which to make money, he must accept one by which at least he could avoid spending it.

"I have brains enough to wear a red coat and be shot at," he thought at last; "and, if I am not killed at once, I can exchange to India, and live upon my pay there." Upon which such visions of brave deeds and glory, elephant-hunting and pig-sticking, rose before the lad's imagination, as made him after a while go back to the house with a somewhat brightened face. And that night he wrote a letter to his guardian and next of kin setting forth his determination, and begging that the family interest might be used to get him a

commission in some regiment on, or bound for, active service without delay.

Now the words "active service," or "wearing a red coat to be shot at," bore a very different significance at a time when the battle of the Alma had been newly fought to what they bear now; and Ralph's guardian, a good practical man of business, at once decided to grant the boy his wish. The army *was* about the best provision that could be made for poor James Seton's son; and without unnecessary delay the family interest set itself to work, to get young Ralph his commission. Not very much interest at that time was wanted: no need of studying for examinations: no difficulties raised even as to age. On the evening of his father's funeral, Ralph first thought of the red coat—six weeks later he wore one, and was on his way to the Crimea; Ludbrooke was let to a pottery-manufacturer, and the furniture, hunters, pictures, all the holy things of Ralph's childhood, were in the hands of the Jews.

He went through all the Crimean campaign, and, to the comfort of his relatives, was not killed; only at Inkerman he got that sabre-cut that marked him for life from a Cossack cuirassier, and his share of ague, rheumatism, and fever in the trenches. He had no opportunity of performing extraordinary deeds of valour, nor was the circumstance of Ensign Seton's face being cut open to the bone mentioned in any of the dispatches sent home to a grateful nation save as a "scratch." By virtue of other men's deaths he got tolerably rapid promotion; his good constitution carried him through his ague and fever; his wound would certainly disfigure him frightfully for years to come, the surgeons said, but it healed as it ought. And at the

end of the war he was in possession of his medals, a captain's pay, and the knowledge, so well did fate obey his wishes, that his regiment was spoken of by those high in authority as "safe for India." At the attack of the Redan—the inglorious ninety minutes, during which as many heroes fell as at Inkerman—Ralph Seton, and every other officer on the field, had behaved to the full as bravely, poor fellows, as though it had been another charge of the Six Hundred. But the men of his regiment had wavered, or were thought to have wavered; they were young boys, raw recruits, arrived from England a week before, and had many of them never fired a rifle in their lives; at all events a court of inquiry was held in consequence of their alleged misconduct, and although no official stigma was actually affixed to its name, it was perfectly well known in the army that the —th, or such of the —th as should remain, would, after the peace, be "safe for India."

To India they went, and had continued there ever since; the regimental plate and the colours, that is to say; the colonel, Major Seton, the quarter-master, and a few of the men—the mutiny, and two or three of the unhealthiest stations in Bengal, not having left much more of what originally sailed from England under the name of the —th. During these years Ralph Seton had returned once, for health's sake, to Europe, during which time he made the acquaintance of Mr. Lovell in Italy. With the exception of those solitary eighteen months, his life, from the day he joined until now, more than thirteen years, had been, plainly and literally, a life spent on duty. He liked his profession as most men after five-and-twenty do like the army; tolerated

it as an evil, one degree better than the poverty and idleness combined which would have awaited him had he left it. Until every farthing of his father's debts were clear, he had sworn to himself not to touch a shilling of his income, and to this oath he kept—living on his pay from first to last, and holding, with stubborn fidelity, by his old regiment into whatever station it was ordered, and when all his brother officers in turn went home invalided, or exchanged, or sold. For amusement he shot tigers and stuck pigs, yearly feeling rather less excitement, perhaps, in the pursuit of these animals; and for society confined himself exclusively to men, among whom, from the tough colonel down to the rawest griff in the regiment, "old Seton" was popular.

To women—to the ladies, that is to say, of Indian stations—Major Seton was an enigma. In spite of his scarred and sunburnt face he might, had he chosen, have been a favourite with them, for he possessed that nameless charm of thorough simple manliness, which even the most frivolous women in their hearts find more irresistible than all Adonis forms and Grecian profiles. But he did not choose it. If, accidentally, he was thrown with the wives or sisters of his brother officers, he was deferential, almost tenderly courteous, in his manner towards them, but there it ended. When he met them at the band or at their drives next day, he returned their smiles with his usual grave salute—horrible old moustache as he was—and neither saw, nor attempted to see, more of them until some new accident forced him into their society.

Was he afraid of them, or of himself, or was he only a commonplace woman-hater? How should they

tell? What should these gay Indian ladies know of the purpose of that lonely life, of the fair unsullied ideal, which, after long years of a soldier's life, Major Seton yet held to in his heart, of women and of love? Round the bungalows of other men hung pictures of fair faces by the score—operatic celebrities, women of the east and of the west, beauties of all nations and all climates: round Major Seton's hung a series of Landseer's proofs, a dozen or so of men's photographs, and of late years one oil-painting of a girl—a girl of about eleven, with blue eyes and a mignonne dark face, standing bare-headed under an Italian sky, and with a panorama of the bay of Genoa outstretched at her feet. Before his visit to Europe there had, it was remembered, been two or three women's portraits on his wall; but upon his return to India he cleared these scrupulously away before hanging up his new possession. "I just prefer seeing the child alone," he remarked, quietly, when one of his friends attempted to joke with him on the dethronement of old favourites; and after this no one asked him any further questions on the subject. There were few men who chose to question Major Seton on any subject respecting which he had once shown a disposition to be reticent.

"And you find her a great deal changed, Ralph?" said Mr. Lovell, while Ralph still continued to stroke down his moustache, and look silently at Archie. "You would not have recognised the little Italian girl you used to play with in this tall, stately, full-grown young person?"

"I should have recognised her anywhere," answered Ralph, "or at least I believe I should," he added, promptly. "Knowing that you lived at Morteville, and

suspecting this to be your house, I certainly remembered Archie's face the first moment that I had a glimpse of it at the window."

"And if any other young woman with red hair and a brown face had been looking out you would have recognised her just the same," cried Archie, carelessly. "One finds what one expects to find! Now that I am told you are Major Seton, I remember Major Seton. If I had met you anywhere else——" she hesitated, and her eyes sank under his.

"If you had met Major Seton anywhere else," put in Bettina, opportunely, "*I* should have been with you of course, Archie, and should have helped you to recollect your papa's friend." The poor little woman was quite bristling with her new sense of wanting everybody belonging to her to be decorous. "Archie needs the society of a few young girls of her own age, Major Seton," she added, apologetically. "Travelling about in the wild way we have done, I have thought it best never to let her mix with any other young people; but living settled in an English county, of course it will be very different."

And then Bettina—Mr. Lovell having gone away to store his cabinets safe out of reach of Jeanneton's hands—put Major Seton through a long course of questions as to the social capabilities of Hatton. Plenty of rich manufacturing people? ah yes, very well in their way, but not what she had been accustomed to in her youth, and the neighbouring clergy of course, and Major Seton himself. But what immediate neighbours?—nice people?—people they would be likely to get on with? and with any girl of Archie's age in the family?

"Well," said Major Seton, "the people to whom you will be nearest are the Durants. Durant's Court is about two miles from the rectory, and Lucia is, I should think, about the same age as Archie."

"Durant—Durant!" chirped Bettina. "Dear me, how familiar it sounds! Archie, where can I have heard the name of Durant lately?"

But Archie had bent her head over a French railway-guide that lay upon the table, and was intently studying the advertisement of a company for reclaiming waste lands near Bordeaux. "I—I beg your pardon, Bettina! What did you say? Davenant? Douro? oh, Durant—why, Durant was the name of that young Englishman I danced with at the ball the other night—don't you remember?"

"Of course it was. A nice little man, Major Seton, with yellow whiskers and a neat figure. Could it have been one of the Staffordshire family, should you think?"

A nice little man, with yellow whiskers and a neat figure! At any other time Archie would have fired up indignantly at such a hideous caricature of Gerald's handsome person, but she remained mute and still now, reading on without noting a word—though months afterwards she could remember it accurately—of that prospectus for reclaiming the waste lands near Bordeaux, while she waited breathlessly for Major Seton's reply.

"A small man with yellow whiskers—that sounds like Gerald. You don't know his Christian name, I suppose?" But he addressed the question pointedly to Bettina, not Archie.

Mrs. Lovell answered no; she had, indeed, not been introduced herself to Mr. Durant; could Archie re-

member if the name of the little man she danced with was Gerald?

"It was," answered Miss Lovell, laconically. "I know it because he wrote his name down on my card, Gerald Sidney Durant." After which she went on diligently with her study of the waste lands. Liability of shareholders to be limited in accordance with the international treaty of 1862: capital already subscribed, 300,000 francs; and then on through a list of directors, bankers, brokers, auditors, and secretaries, down to the solicitors and temporary offices of the company.

"Well, Gerald Sidney Durant will before very long be one of your closest neighbours," went on Major Seton, in his quiet voice. "He is engaged to be married to his cousin Lucia, the heiress of Durant's Court."

Archie Lovell's heart turned to ice: Bettina, always fired into intense excitement by the barest mention of a marriage, began immediately to ply Major Seton with questions. When would it take place? Where would the young people live? How much a year would they have to start with? Had he not interrupted her she would before long have got, no doubt, to the materials of the bride's dress, and what Archie would wear if she should be invited to be bridesmaid.

"It has been a very long engagement indeed, Mrs. Lovell;" and something in the distinct tone of his voice, in the scrupulous way in which he continued to address himself to Bettina, made Archie feel that every word he uttered was designedly, and of malice aforethought, addressed to herself. "An engagement commencing when Miss Durant was about two years of age and Gerald nine. There have been rumours of late, I hear, of a misunderstanding between them," he added; "but the

idea of the engagement being really broken off is ridiculous. Sir John and Lady Durant are just as much in love with Gerald as Lucia is—”

“And Gerald himself?” cried Archie, as Major Seton hesitated, forgetting the waste lands and the part she was acting and everything else in her intense eagerness to hear what Gerald felt.

“Gerald himself *must* marry Lucia Durant,” replied Major Seton, looking round, for the first time, at the girl’s flushing face. “He has no choice at all in the matter.”

“Oh, I thought a man always had some choice as to the woman he marries.”

“Not when he is tied hand and foot, like poor Gerald. The lad is over head and ears in debt; his cousin Lucia on her marriage will have a clear fifteen hundred a year, and eventually every shilling her father has to leave. I should say, with what his wife brought him,” added the Major, in his accurate Scotch way, “very close upon fifty thousand pounds.”

Fifty thousand pounds! Archie felt the same sort of profound crushing conviction as to her own worthlessness as she had done when Gerald first showed her the photograph of Lucia’s faultless features. Fifty thousand pounds! and she, a pauper, had dared to think it possible that he liked her!

“I see,” she murmured, half to herself, and dropping her face down over the book again; “I suppose there *is* no choice left when a man once decides to sell himself for money.”

“Sell, my dear Archie!” cried Bettina. “Do leave off those silly, indeed indelicate, expressions. This Mr. Gerald Durant is a very lucky man indeed, and it will

be a great privilege to you having a nice young married woman living so near us. The young people will continue to live at the Court, I suppose, Major Seton?" And straightway visions of wedding-parties, dinner-parties, morning calls, and the dresses that she, the rector's wife, would wear on all these occasions, presented themselves with delicious breadth and fulness of detail, before Bettina's mind.

"When you condemn a man for marrying for money, you should remember what the man is," remarked Ralph, who already had fallen into the habit common to all human creatures who knew her, of answering about one in fifteen of Bettina's questions. "If you knew Gerald as I do, Archie, you would feel it impossible to apply any harsh terms to him, whatever he does."

"Should I?"

"Yes, I am quite sure you would. My own practical experience of Gerald's character has been confined to the years when we were boys together—or rather when I was an old boy, he a child; for there are a good many years between us—and to the few weeks I spent with him when I was home on leave seven years ago; but yet I believe I know him as well as if I had never lost sight of him in all the intervening time. What Gerald was at twelve I found him as a Guardsman of nineteen, and shall find him again now at twenty-six. Characters like his develop, of course, but they don't change."

Just at this juncture Bettina—even in her new dreams of greatness not unmindful of the present honour of the house—remembered that there was only the remains of the cold fillet and a salad for supper, and

jumping up, with a string of apologies to Major Seton, prepared to leave the room.

"I shan't be away from you five minutes, Major Seton, but Frederick will be impatient unless I help him with his cabinets." Mr. Lovell would not have let her touch one of them for the universe. "Archie, my love, amuse Major Seton by showing him your photographs while I am gone." And then she rushed off to the kitchen to send Jeanneton to the Couronne d'Argent (the back way, on account of Mrs. Maloney) for a roti and sweets; and Archie and Major Seton were left alone.

For the first time in her life Miss Lovell experienced the sensation of shyness. Her hands trembled; the colour rose and fell in her face. When Bettina left the room it was as much as she could do not to get up and follow her. But Major Seton saw, or pretended that he saw, no symptom of her embarrassment.

"You have heard of your father's new prospects, of course, Archie?" he remarked, but without having the air of seeking to change their conversation. "I need scarcely ask you if you are glad at his good fortune. I suppose England is a sort of El Dorado to your mind at present?"

Then Archie raised her eyes, and looked at Ralph Seton full. He was scrutinizing her face, she felt, line by line, and she fancied there was an anxious, half-pained look upon his own, as though he would fain have bid her speak the truth, and trust in him, and take him to be her friend. Should she do so? Her heart said yes; and she stammered out his name—"Ralph!"

He was at her side in a moment; stooping over her

low, and holding both her little cold hands in one of his own large ones. Archie's heart beat horribly thick—thicker far than when she stood alone on London Bridge by night with Gerald Durant. Gerald was young and handsome, and boyish; so much nearer her own size in every way than this great soldier, with his staid manner and his enormous height, and his rough, old, scarred, and weatherbeaten face—more scarred and weatherbeaten than she had known, now that she saw it close! A mortal terror overcame her that he might be going to kiss her again, and she jumped up nervously, and snatched her hands away from him.

"I—I think I must go after Bettina, Major Seton, that is," stammering and looking more and more frightened, "I mean, papa may want me."

"Directly; when you have answered my question. Are you glad of this prospect of seeing England for the first time?"

"Why do you ask me?" she cried, the first instinctive impulse towards confession growing weaker every moment. "Of course I am glad. Of course it will be better to live respectably in a parsonage than to knock about the world as we have done." And she drew herself up to her full height, and tossing her hair back over her shoulders, looked steadily, almost defiantly, into Major Seton's face.

"And it really is the first time that you will see England?" he repeated, slowly and distinctly. "I understood your father right. You have never been in England since you were born?"

"Never!" cried Archie, with a sort of gasp. "Or,

at least, papa and Bettina say so, and of course they ought to know."

After which she felt better; her dread of Ralph, her shyness, her hesitation gone. She was in a new world, and yet it seemed to her as though she had been accustomed to it all her life; as though falsehoods were very easy to tell when the time came; nay, more, as though, after the first cold shock was over, there was a kind of pleasant pungency or zest in telling them!

Major Seton walked away to the window, plunged his hands into his coat-pockets, and put his lips into the set compressed position which for him meant whistling. "He knows nothing," thought Archie, as she watched him. "He is not sure, or he would have asked me more questions, and I was right to put him off. Am I to go about telling wild stories of myself to everybody, now that poor papa is a rector?"

And forgetting that she wanted to follow Bettina, she sat down and returned to the study of the waste lands, while Ralph Seton stood for five minutes or more in the same attitude, his lips going through the same pantomime of whistling as he gazed out steadily into the street.

He suffered—strong man as he was—an intense, a fearful loss during these five minutes: he lost the one pure belief of the last six years of his life. The women he had taken down from his walls when he first hung Archie there, might be put back again he felt; the picture of the fresh unsullied child, for whose sake he had dethroned them, was the picture of something that had no existence now. Archie Lovell was a woman, just as well worth loving and marrying as other women

perhaps, but his ideal of truth and innocence and unstained loyalty no longer.

He came back, and looked at her very long and kindly. "Miss Lovell" he said at last, for the first time not calling her Archie, "you are a grown-up young lady as your father reminded me now, and I—well there is more difference between us by far than there was in Genoa, when you were a little child and I was your playfellow—your tame bear rather, as you used to call me. I can't expect you will give me your confidence now as you used, but"—his voice shook slightly—"I hope we shall be very good neighbours indeed when you come to England, and that if ever you should by possibility need me you will look upon me as your friend."

But though he was quite close to where she sat, he made no attempt to approach any nearer to her now; and with a quick contraction of the heart, the girl felt that she need not be afraid of the pressure of the huge hands, of the contact of the rough moustache again. Half child, half woman as she was, Archie Lovell's real liking for Major Seton dated from that moment. For in that moment she acknowledged him to be, not her slave, not her equal, but her master!

"If you don't like to tell the truth, don't tell it. I shall not betray you, and I will play with you just as usual. Only—don't kiss me. I will never let you kiss me until you are brave enough to take the blame off Tino." She recalled again that threat of years ago; recalled the night she had cried so bitterly because he held so staunchly to his word; and how at length he *had* kissed her again; kissed and loved, and trusted her more than ever! What would he think if he knew the

truth now? Would he ever take her back to his regard if he discovered the falsehood she had this moment told him?

As she bent her face low down over her book, Major Seton stood and watched her still. He watched the outline of the graceful head; the bend of the girlish throat, the delicately-modelled arm that lay upon the table, the dark lashes resting on the soft flushed cheek—every outward charm developed into sweet perfection of this child he had made an idol of! And as he stood, he put her resolutely away out of his heart. The thought of coming back and finding her thus; the child's face changed into a woman's—but the child's loyal heart matured into a woman's integrity—the hope of one day winning her for his wife, had been, during more than six years, the poetry, the brightness of Ralph Seton's lonely life. And now with the material part of his destiny accomplished, his father's debts paid, Ludbrooke his own again, and Archie before him—fairer than he had seen her in his dreams—he stood, even in the first hour of their meeting, and put her resolutely away out of his heart.

He was no enthusiast, with romantic visions of women being angels; he was a very plain and cautious man, fresh enough, certainly, to desire to possess a beautiful face by his own fireside, but who had seen sufficient of the world, and of the worst part of the world, to know when prudence bade him subordinate inclination to reason. For common conventionalities, for what are termed the opinions of society, he cared nothing. If Archie had boldly confessed that she had gone to London with Gerald, nay, had she confessed that she went of set purpose, not by accident, he might

have liked her rather the better for the pluck such an escapade showed—experience having told him that in extreme youth the best women are sometimes those who incur the maddest risks. But a girl who, at seventeen, could raise her blue eyes innocently, and toss her curls back like a child, and, looking full into a man's face, tell a deliberate falsehood, as she had done a minute ago, was no wife for him. He loved her: would love her with passion if he married her; would put his life, and what was dearer than his life, into her hands, and then—some day wake to find that the blue eyes were traitors, the red lips foresworn! He had seen not a few such endings to men's happiness in India, and was too great a coward (this was his own thought) to run the risk himself. A girl who could deceive without a blush at seventeen, might make a good wife still for some young fellow who should so command her heart as to put all temptation to deceit out of her way. An old soldier like him must marry a truer or a plainer woman if he married at all—but never this one!

And so, with tender pity for the little girl, with chivalrous resolve to be her friend all the more because from henceforth he would never be her lover, Major Seton put Archie away out of his heart as he stood and looked at her.

CHAPTER XX.

Captain Waters' Sense of Duty.

MAJOR SETON returned again to England that evening. He had not been able, he said, to deny himself the pleasure of bearing good news to his old friends, but it was impossible for him to do more than pay them a flying visit now. His papers must be sent in to the Horse Guards at once; he had a visit to pay in Scotland; hosts of lawyers' business to get through in London. And when Archie and Mr. Lovell went down to the pier to see him off by the last steamer, they never knew that among the luggage from the *Couronne d'Argent* was a portmanteau bearing the name of Major Seton, —th Regiment; never knew that, in spite of his business, he had made preparations for staying with them a week, and had remained five hours.

Before leaving home Miss Lovell stole out into the courtyard of the house, and gathered a branch of myrtle in full flower that grew against its southern wall. She wore it in her belt till the minute came for saying good-bye; then took it out and began to trifle with its leaves irresolutely. If Major Seton would only ask her for it, she thought! If she could only see her flower in his button-hole when he went away, she should feel as if there was a sort of friendly compact between them still. She remembered the jealous care with which she used to pin a flower into his coat every morning at Genoa, and how, withered or not withered, he always left it there through the remainder of the day. But Major Seton held his hand out and said "Good-bye, Miss Lovell," very much in the same tone as he said good-bye to her father; then went quietly away down the steps to the boat that was waiting to

take him to the steamer. A choking feeling came in Archie's throat as she leant across the bulwark of the pier and watched him. How different Gerald's handsome animated face had looked when he bade her good-bye—horrible grim old soldier that Major Seton was! And partly through temper, partly by accident, partly on purpose—who shall divine the motives of a girl of seventeen?—she flung away her myrtle branch, and it fell into the boat, almost between Major Seton's hands.

"Well aimed, child," said her father, putting his arm round her shoulder. "You and Ralph are just as fierce lovers as ever, I see, Archie."

"Lovers!" cried Archie, with a quick toss of the head. "You forget, I think, papa, that I'm not eleven years old now. Poor old Ralph, a lover for me, indeed!" But she watched very narrowly to see what poor old Ralph would do, and she kissed her hand to him with one of her brightest smiles, as soon as she saw with what tender care he picked her myrtle up; and how religiously he stored it away within the breast of his grey great-coat.

And this was the picture of her that Ralph took away with him; her face flushing in the setting sun; her blue eyes smiling; her lips parted as she kissed her little hand to him; her father's arm around her shoulder. Major Seton betook himself to one of the paddle boxes from whence he watched the two figures on the pier, and afterwards Morteville, till all were out of sight. Then he got out his pocket-book and, turning still in the direction of France, looked long and closely at a photograph that Mr. Lovell had given him before he left; a photograph of a girl, with long fair hair unbound, dressed in a loose blouse, with a palette and brushes in her hand; and finally, he took from his

breast the piece of myrtle that Archie had thrown to him, and held it (no one fortunately being near to witness the utterly ridiculous action) to his lips.

These were the first steps by which the old moustache carried out his resolve of putting Miss Lovell away out of his heart!

Meanwhile Mr. Lovell and his daughter strolled slowly homeward in the pleasant evening sunlight. The last twenty-four hours seemed to have alienated Archie strangely from all her former happy childish life; and she clung now with a welcome sense of peace to the dear arm which had been her stay always; looked up with a remorseful yearning of love to the dear face which she knew no folly, no guilt of hers, could ever cause to look upon her boldly. What was Gerald Durant, what was Major Seton, compared to him? A pang smote her heart as she felt how quickly she had been able to forget him for these strangers; the consciousness that she *had* forgotten him made her manner to him tenderer, her smile more loving than usual, as they walked along.

"That cabinet you have bought is a beauty, papa. I shall hardly like it to ever go away again. You never picked up such a *bonheur du jour* before."

"Archie," answered Mr. Lovell, in the calm voice of a man announcing some excellence too patent to need enlarging upon, "it is a Reisener, the design by Boucher, and executed in marqueterie with an art, a delicacy, that makes it a perfect cabinet picture in wood. If it is worth a sou it is worth four thousand francs. Perhaps now that I am rich man," added the poor fellow, looking as radiant as a child, "a rich country parson, Archie, with four hundred pounds a year, I may feel myself justified in keeping that cabinet for my own enjoyment."

"I wish you could, papa, and the clock too—that beautiful Boule clock. Ah, if we had only more money! Money enough to pay off all our debts and start in England clear."

"Oh, as to money I have arranged that very easily," said Mr. Lovell, lightly. "But don't mistake about the clock, Archie. As a speculation I did well to buy it, but I would not care to possess it as a gift. Boule, as you know, had two styles. In his first and glorious one, he worked in plain, honest brass and ebony. In his second—in his decadence, his shame! he sacrificed art to the miserable fashion of the day, of which this tawdry toy I bought at Amiens is a specimen. Lowered himself and his splendid talent to mother-of-pearl. Don't forget this again, child—'tis a most important distinction."

"And the money, papa? The money to pay off all our creditors and start us afresh in England?"

"Oh, yes—the money! A mere trifle—six or eight hundred pounds at most."

"And how shall we raise it? Would the bishop advance your salary, do you think, if you were to explain everything to him?" Miss Lovell's knowledge of church matters was sketchy in the extreme.

"The bishop advance my salary!" said Mr. Lovell, laughing. "No, you little goose. Some one much better than a bishop has advanced me what I want already."

Archie's cheeks fired in a moment. She knew too well her father's fatal habit of borrowing from whomsoever he came across to doubt the meaning of his words. This explained the long conversation which her father and Major Seton had had together in the studio: this explained the cause of his joyous light-heartedness as they walked down to see Ralph off by the steamer.

"Oh, papa, I hope poor Major Seton has not—"

"Archie, my love," interrupted Mr. Lovell, quickly, "poor Major Seton is a man with a clear twelve or fifteen hundred a year, and—thanks to his own honourable exertions and economy—a very handsome balance at his banker's. I explained to him the exact position in which I stand, and how my new poem, or 'Troy,' or both, must be sacrificed to pay my debts, and he saw instantly, as a matter of business—a matter of business, my dear, that you can't understand, how much wiser it would be to bide a fitting time instead of trying to force works of art or literature upon the market. In six weeks "Troy" will be finished. I shall exhibit it at the Royal Academy next spring, and if it only brings me five or six hundred pounds (the half of its real value) it will go a great way towards setting us straight."

"And meanwhile, Major Seton has helped us? Tell me, papa, I would rather know."

"Certainly, Archie, you shall know. I like you to hear everything that is in our good old friend's favour. In the meanwhile Seton advances me one thousand pounds, to be repaid him with the interest of fifty pounds this day year. We shall thus be enabled to pay off every farthing of our foreign debts, to sacrifice neither 'Troy' nor my book, and to surround ourselves in our poor little parsonage with objects of art and grace instead of the mere bodily necessities, the bare walls and chairs and tables, with which most country parsons are I fancy content! Ralph is a shrewd fellow," he added; "no doubt of that. The Scotch blood shows in his aptness for business if in nothing else. Five per cent. without risk, is an investment one does not meet with every day. He told me so himself."

Archie was silent. To argue with her father on money matters was, she well knew, fruitless. He believed, simply, that he was acting with the nicest honour in paying his foreign debtors out of another man's money; believed, implicitly, that "Troy" would sell for five hundred guineas. Her quick imagination pictured him already, dreaming and poetizing, and living beyond his means (that was inevitable) in the new rectory; the house filled with pictures and cabinets, "Troy" unsold, and the interest even of that thousand pounds of Ralph's never paid. "You know best, papa," with a quiet little reproach in her voice; "and when it is a question of selling your pictures or poems, I don't like to speak a word. But I do wish we could have started in England without being under obligation to any one."

"You make me feel my want of success, Archie, when you say that," was his answer. Whenever money affairs were talked of, Mr. Lovell had a trick of falling back plaintively upon his hard work and his evil luck, as though to turn aside his listener from the unwelcome subject. "I have not—God knows I have not failed, as far as labour goes, one year since you were born. Only the reward has been tardy of coming! If I had had the luck of other men, writers and painters, inferior to me in ability, you would not have to reproach me now, child, with my want of independence."

A flush passed over his pale face, and in a moment Archie repented of what she had said, and fell to comforting him—the wise head of seventeen comforting the baby of forty-five—as she had done all her life whenever the word "failure" passed his lips. "They will not go on misunderstanding you for ever, dear. When we live in England you'll be able to know the Royal Academy people personally, and when they know

you they will be sure to like you, and to accept your pictures. I dare say it's a great deal more favour than merit, if we really knew, that gets pictures and poems accepted in London—and your new poem must be liked, I am sure of it. There is only a quarter of a canto to finish still, is there, papa?"

And having now started her father upon the subject, which to him embraced all other interests of life, Archie felt, with intense relief, that this at least would be no time for her own confession. She had meant faithfully to tell him everything during her walk home. Every word she had spoken had been, in reality, a prelude to the confession she was seeking to make. Yet now that chance seemed to have turned the opportunity for confession aside, she was thankful exceedingly for the reprieve. Let him be at peace to-day at all events, poor fellow! Let him be happy in the discussion of his new and brightened prospects, and to-morrow when she had had a night to think over it all, and frame her story into the words that should pain him least, she would tell him and Bettina together what she had done.

Just as they reached their house in the Rue d'Artois, they were met by Captain Waters, dressed in the height of French watering-place fashion, and smoking his twelfth, or final cigarette before dinner. As Archie and her father approached he put himself so resolutely, hat in hand, in their path, that Mr. Lovell, who ordinarily shunned all the English world of Morteville, felt himself constrained to stop.

"A fine evening, Miss Wilson. You have been making your usual stroll on the sands, I suppose?"

"No, Captain Waters, we have been on the pier seeing a friend of ours away by the steamer."

It was new for the Lovell family to possess a friend

in Morteville, and Archie felt a little proud of announcing the fact.

"Your friend will have a fine passage, then. It was very calm at sea last night, was it not?"

"I—I believe so," she answered, her face flushing scarlet at the suddenness of the question. "But I was told you went over to the Calais *fêtes* yesterday, Captain Waters. You ought to know."

"My wife and myself spent yesterday in Amiens," remarked Mr. Lovell, innocently. "We were at the sale of the Château Floriac and only returned this morning. It was one of the most extraordinary sales of old and valuable wood-carvings that I remember to have seen in France, Captain Waters. I purchased myself a *bonheur du jour* that is known, historically, to have been carved for Madame de Pompadour, and a clock — but I don't know whether you are a connoisseur in the artifice of that particular period, sir?"

"I believe I am a connoisseur in the artifices of all periods and all nations," answered Waters, with an imperceptible smile, and a glance at Archie, whose mingled *finesse* and insolence it would be hard to describe. "But my knowledge," he added, addressing himself deferentially to Mr. Lovell, "or what passes to myself for knowledge in such matters, would be contemptible compared to yours. I have long heard that in all matters of antiquarian art your judgment is simply unrivalled."

"Well — yes — I believe it is the one subject I know something about," replied Mr. Lovell, for whose easily-pleased vanity no flattery was too palpable. "In such rare intervals of leisure as I have been able to snatch from my own work, I have dabbled for years in

bricbracquerie all over Europe, and with tolerable success."

"And by this time must have quite a collection of art treasures?" said Waters, who seemed determined to prolong the conversation. "You have not got them with you here in Morteville, of course?"

"No, no," answered Mr. Lovell. "My poor art treasures, as you are pleased to call them, are in Paris, and will remain there till I take them with me to England—I hope, in two or three weeks from the present time."

Captain Waters was politely interested at once in Mr. Wilson's departure; had no idea that Morteville was so soon to lose them; and poor Mr. Lovell in his simplicity began forthwith to expatiate on his plans, while Archie, her heart swelling with indignant disgust, stood silently by and listened. She knew her father's peculiarity on this point of old. Shy to the most painful degree, shy to such an extent that he would walk any number of miles sooner than have to stop and speak to an acquaintance in the street, Mr. Lovell, in the hands of a man like Waters could, with one or two well-timed compliments, be drawn into the foolish confidence of a child.

"We have been living very quietly indeed, here in Morteville, Captain Waters," he said at last, "which must explain the want of hospitality I have shown to my friends, yourself among others;" he had spoken to Waters about twice in his life before; "friends whom under different circumstances it would have given me real pleasure to entertain; but if you ever come to our part of the country I shall be happy, very happy indeed, to see you." He was meditating a sidelong escape to the house as he said this; and thought that a hazy offer of distant hospitality might be the easiest way of covering his retreat.

Captain Waters raised his hat, in his courteous

foreign fashion, and expressed the pleasure it would give him to renew Mr. Wilson's acquaintance. "In—in Leicestershire, I think you said?" he added, carelessly. "A county I know remarkably well, and often visit."

"No, in Staffordshire; Hatton, in Staffordshire," said Mr. Lovell; "stay, I will give you the address." And he took out a card and wrote upon it in pencil his address. "The Honourable and Rev. Frederick Lovell, Hatton, Staffordshire;" then shaking his friend's hand, with warmth prompted by his intense nervous desire to get quit of him, ran away into the house.

Captain Waters examined the card curiously for a minute. "The Honourable and Rev. Frederick Lovell, Miss Wilson?" he remarked, raising his eyes to Archie's face. "I must really ask you to decipher this mystery for me. Who is the Honourable and Reverend Frederick Lovell? and why has Mr. Wilson been kind enough to give me his address?"

"The Reverend Frederick Lovell is my father," answered Archie, stiffly; "I am sure I cannot tell why he gave you his address."

She moved, as though to follow her father into the house, but Captain Waters had placed himself in such a position that she could not pass without actually requesting him to move. "And—my question may seem indiscreet," he continued; "but why have we here in Morteville not known the honourable and reverend character of the gentleman who was living among us?"

"Because, living in such a place, and among *such* people, my father found it convenient to pass under an assumed name," cried Archie, with a superb toss of her head. "Are you satisfied, Captain Waters?"

"Oh, entirely," answered Waters, with a half smile.

"Living in such a place, and among *such* people, the Honourable Frederick Lovell has showed great wisdom, I think, in concealing his name. How long has your papa been rector of Hatton, Miss Wilson?—Miss Lovell, I really beg your pardon for falling back into old bad habits."

"There is no need to apologize—indeed I hardly see why you should talk of old habits; did we ever speak to each other in our lives before, Captain Waters? My father has been rector of Hatton about four days. The old rector died a week or so ago, and Lord Lovell, my grandfather, has given the living to papa. I must really ask you to let me pass, please."

She swept past him with the manner of a little queen, and turning slightly as soon as she found herself within the shelter of their own door, gave him a freezing inclination of her head, as much as to say, "Go! I have dismissed you!"

Captain Waters admired Archie Lovell warmly at this minute. That she suspected his possession of her secret he was certain; that she dared to brave him, answer his impertinent questions with impertinent answers, and stand looking at him now with this air of regal dismissal, pleased him infinitely. To have possessed the secret of any ordinary English school-girl of her age, would have offered poor chance either of profit or amusement to himself. An ordinary school-girl who would have blushed and cried, and supplicated to him to spare her, and then probably have gone, straight-way, and betrayed herself to her mamma! To possess the secret of a girl like this, a girl who, at her age, had a woman's courage as well as a woman's duplicity might, well worked, be really a little mine of diversion and of profit to him. For a secret that escapade

evidently was: Mr. Lovell's innocent account of his journey to Amiens had betrayed so much to him, and however foolhardy the girl had been when she was Miss Wilson, it was almost mathematically clear to Captain Waters' perception that Miss Lovell, the daughter of the Honourable and Reverend rector of Hatton, would be sage!

It was the habit of this man's life, a necessity forced upon him by his profession, perhaps, to assign to every human creature with whom he was thrown the worst, the most selfish motives possible. "My lot has been cast among bad specimens of humanity," he would say, candidly, in speaking of his own cynicism. "For more years than I can count, the worst people in the worst continental towns have been my study, and when by accident I have to deal with the really good and virtuous, I mechanically apply the same low standard to them as to the rest. And it is really curious to remark," he would add, putting up his eye-glass, and looking languidly in his listener's face, "curious, very, to remark how nicely the same measure seems to fit everybody after all!"

"And you will leave Morteville soon, then, I fear, Miss Lovell, from what your papa said?"

"Very soon, I hope, Captain Waters. I am heartily glad to get away from the place, and from everything connected with it."

"Everything, Miss Lovell? Can you really say so? Will you have no one pleasant recollection of poor little Morteville? No walk, no ball, at which you have enjoyed yourself?"

"No; there is not one circumstance, and certainly not one person here, that I want to remember." But still she did not go away. Something in the expression

of Waters' face seemed to constrain her, in spite of her repugnance for the man, to hear all that he had to say.

"I understand. The past and all belonging to it, pleasant or the reverse, is to be buried. Miss Lovell"—abruptly—"is Hatton, in Staffordshire, anywhere in the neighbourhood of Durant's Court, do you know?"

Her heart beat so violently that for a moment she could not trust herself to speak; then, with a supreme effort of self-command, she answered, as indifferently as she could, yes. The rectory at Hatton was, she had heard, about two miles distant from Durant's Court.

"Ah! that will be charming for all parties," said Waters, pleasantly. "No wonder, Miss Lovell, that you are glad to leave Morteville. I should like very much myself to meet Gerald Durant again," he added. "He was an uncommonly pleasant fellow in his way, capital companion, and all that, but not quite the stamp of man, perhaps, one could make a friend of. Shifty, rather; a new caprice every five minutes; no sooner winning a thing than he was sure to tire of it. You agree with me, Miss Lovell?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," cried Archie, desperately. "What should I know of Mr. Durant? Why do you ask me?"

Waters advanced a step within the open door-way, and put his head quite close to Archie's. "Miss Lovell," he whispered, "I am sorry that you treat me with so little confidence. You are wrong, I think; for I wish—upon my soul I wish—to stand your friend; and I have it in my power to do so. Do you believe me?"

A look of frightened disgust was all her answer; but Captain Waters did not appear in the slightest degree discountenanced. "This is not the time to tell you what I mean," he went on, still in a half-whisper,

and in the same odious closeness of position. "What I have got to say will take time, and should be said in a place"—and as he spoke he glanced at Madame Brun's open window—"where there is no possibility of eaves-droppers. Now, if I might hope to meet you on the Grève of a morning? To-morrow morning, for example?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. What can you have to tell me?" she stammered. "If you want to say anything, say it now. When I walk on the Grève it is with papa."

Just at this moment Jeanneton—hot and indignant still, from her recent encounters with Bettina—came forth; laden with straw, bass dust, and deposit of all kinds from the cases of bric-à-brac, on her way to the court. At the sight of mademoiselle in conversation with another gentleman (and a very pretty little gentleman, Jeanneton decided, as she mentally compared Waters with Major Seton), she stopped short, opened her mouth wide, and prepared to listen or join in the conversation, according to the custom of French servants of her class.

Waters was not slow at turning her opportune appearance to account. "You see this is not a place to talk in, Miss Lovell," he urged, but in a coldly-differential manner, now that the servant's eyes were upon them. "Tell me, please, if I can see you on the Grève to-morrow, or not? There is a very unpleasant story going the round of the place to-day, which makes it my duty to communicate with some member of your family. Can you meet me, or," he added this with marked emphasis, "shall my communication be made in writing to Mr. Lovell himself?"

He had found out the way to subjugate her at last. At the mention of her father, at the thought of what this story must be that Waters threatened to write to him about, every tinge of colour forsook Archie's face.

She clasped her hands together as if a sharp bodily pain had smitten her. "No, no, Captain Waters! write nothing, say nothing to papa, and I will meet you whenever you choose. On the Grève, if you will, to-morrow morning. Only, if he is with me, say nothing please till I can manage to see you alone! We always like to spare poor papa any trouble that we can," she added half apologetically, and lifting her eyes with an expression of mute entreaty to Captain Waters' impassive face.

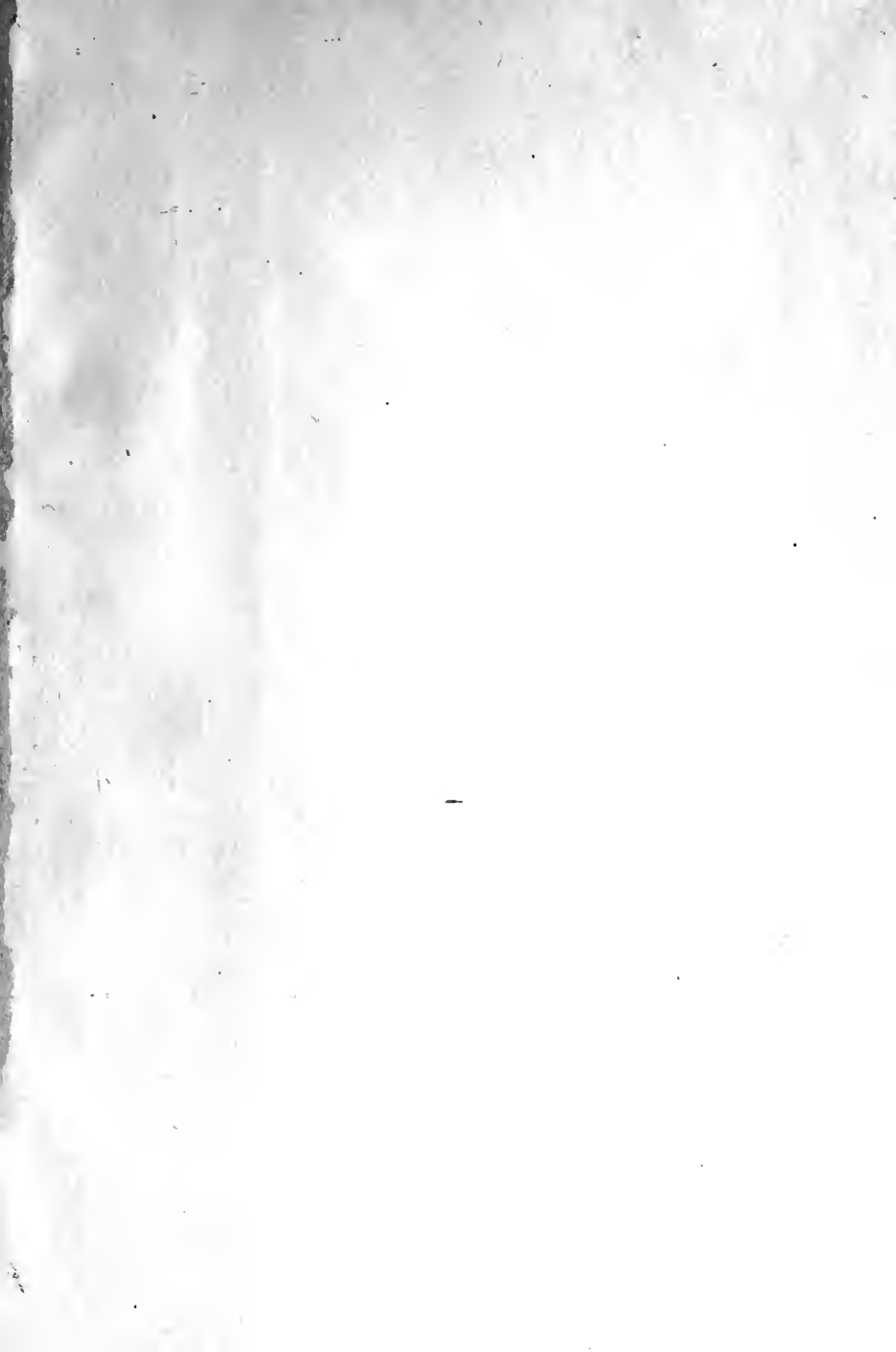
"Don't be afraid, Miss Lovell; I shall behave with the most perfect discretion in every way, you may rest assured. To-morrow morning on the Grève then; between ten and eleven will not be too early? And in the meantime, mademoiselle, *au plaisir de vous revoir*."

He took his hat off to the ground, then sauntered jauntily away down the Rue d'Artois, twirling his diminutive cane in one little well-gloved hand, with the other alternately caressing his pointed, flaxen moustache, and putting up his eye-glass, but with dilettante curiosity rather than impertinence, at every woman who chanced to pass him on the *trottoir*.

"And this is respectability," thought Archie, bitterly. "This is Philistinism, and the kind of price one has to pay for it! Oh! that the rector of Hatton hadn't died, and that I might have dared tell Ralph the truth, and bade this man and every one else in Morteville do their worst!"

And with a hard sullen look, such as in all her happy Bohemian life her face had never worn before; her teeth set, her eyes fixed and dilated till all their blue seemed gone; she stood and watched Captain Waters' retreating figure till it was out of sight.

END OF VOL. I.



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Edwards, (Mrs.) Annie
Archie Lovell

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